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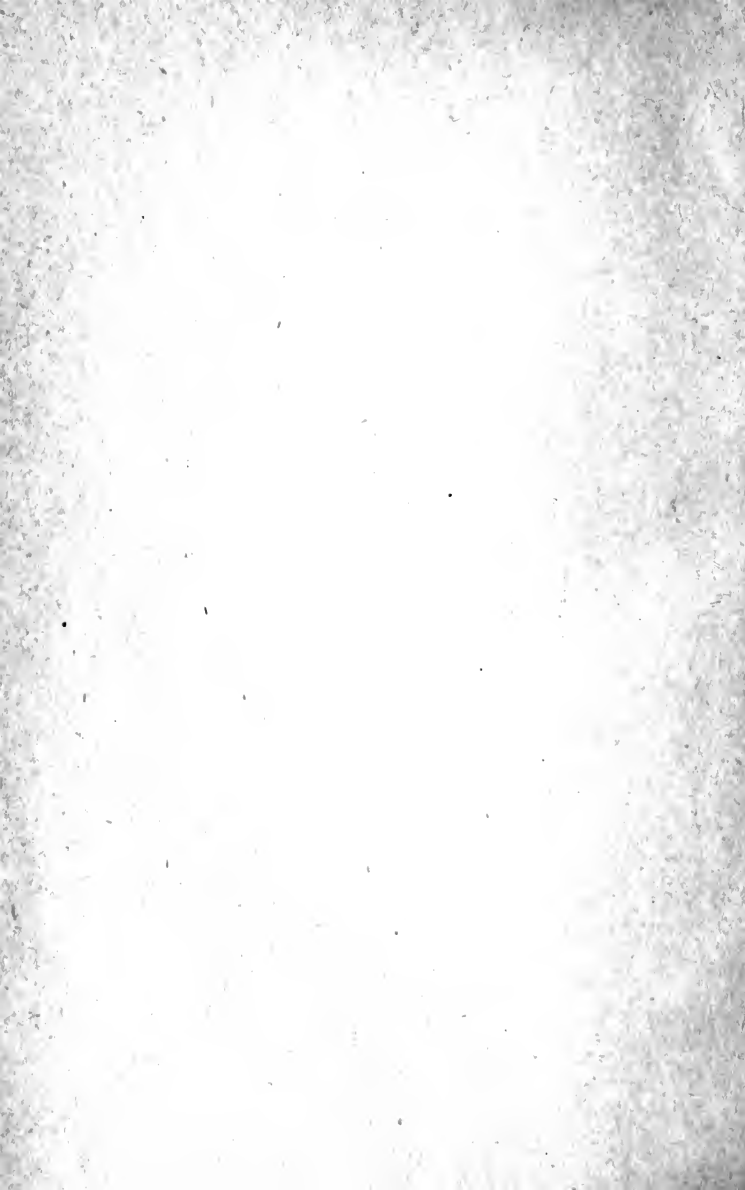
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# THE LAIRD OF NORLAW.

A SCOTTISH STORY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“MARGARET MAITLAND,” “LILLIESLEAF,” “ORPHANS,”

“THE DAYS OF MY LIFE,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# THE LAIRD OF NORLAW.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE Mistress travelled home once more by the slow canal to Edinburgh, and from thence by the stage coach to Kirkbride. She had left Patie, at last, with some degree of confidence, having seen Mr. Crawford, the manager of the foundry, and commended her son specially to his care; and having, besides, done what she could to improve the comfort of Patie's little apartment, and to warn him against the temptations of Glasgow. It was rather heavy work afterwards, gliding silently home alone by the

monotonous motion of that canal, seeing the red-tiled cottages, the green slopes, the stubble-fields move past like a dream, and remembering how she had left her boys behind, one on the sea, and one among strangers, both embarked upon the current of their life. She sat still in the little cabin of the boat by one of the windows, moving nothing but her fingers, which clasped and unclasped mechanically. Her big black veil hung over her bonnet, but did not shroud her face; there was always moisture in her eyes, but very seldom tears that came the length of falling; and her mind was very busy, and with life in its musings—for it was not alone of the past she was thinking, but also of the future—of her own life at home, where Huntley's self-denial had purchased comfort for his mother, and where his mother, not to be outdone, silently determined upon the course of those days, which she did not mean to be days of leisure. This Melmar, which had been a bugbear to the Mistress all

her days, gradually changed its aspect now. It no longer reminded her of the great bitterness of her life—it was her son's possible inheritance, and might be the triumphant occasion of Huntley's return.

It was late on a September afternoon, when she descended from the coach at the door of the Norlaw Arms, and found Cosmo and Marget waiting there to welcome her. The evening sunshine streamed full in their faces, falling in a tender glory from the opposite brae of Tyne, where the white manse at the summit, and the cottages among the trees, shone in the tranquil light, with their kindest look of home. The Mistress turned hurriedly from the familiar prospect, to repose her tired and wet eyes on the shadowed corner of the village street, where the gable of the little inn kept out the sunshine, and where the ostler had lifted down her trunk. She grasped Cosmo's hand hastily, and scarcely ventured to look the boy in the face; it was dreary coming home alone; as she

descended, Bowed Jaacob at the smithy door took off his cowl in token of respect, and eyed her grimly with his twinkling eye. Jaacob, who was a moral philosopher, was rather satisfied, on the whole, with the demeanour of the family of Norlaw under their troubles, and testified his approbation by a slightly authoritative approval. The Mistress gave him a very hasty nod, but could not look even at Jaacob; a break-down, or public exhibition of emotion, being the thing of all others most nervously avoided by respectable matrons of her country and temper, a characteristic very usual among Scotchwomen, of middle-age and sober mind. She would have "thought shame" to have been seen crying or "giving way," "in the middle of the town," as, even now, enlightened by the sight of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Liverpool, the Mistress still called the village street of Kirkbride; another hasty nod acknowledged the sympathetic courtesy of the widow who kept the village



mangle, and whose little boy had wept at the door of Norlaw when its master was dying; and then Cosmo and Marget took the trunk between them, and the Mistress drew down her veil, and the little party set out, across the foot-bridge, through the tender slanting sunshine, going home.

Then, at last, between the intervals of question and answer as to the common matters of country life, which had occurred during her absence, the Mistress's lips were opened. Marget and Cosmo went on before, along the narrow pathway by the river, and she followed. Cosmo had spent half of his time at the manse, it appeared, and all the neighbours had sent to make kindly inquiry when his mother was expected home.

“It's my hope you didna gang oftener than you were welcome laddie,” said the Mistress, with a characteristic doubt; “but I'll no deny the minister's aye very kind, and Katie too. You should not call her Katie now, Cosmo, she's

woman grown. I said the very same to Huntley no' a week ago, but *he's* no like to offend onybody, poor lad, for many a day to come. And I left him very weel on the whole—oh, yes, very weel, in a grand ship for size, and mony mair in her—and they say they'll soon be out of our northerly seas, and win to grand weather; and whiles I think, if there was *great* danger, fewer folk would gang—no' to say that the Almighty's no' a bit nigher by land than he is by sea."

"Eh! and that's true!" cried Marget, in an involuntary amen.

The Mistress was not perfectly pleased by the interruption. This tender mother could not help being imperative even in her tenderest affections; and even the faithful servant could not share her mother-anxieties without risk of an occasional outbreak.

"How's a' the kye?" said the Mistress, with a momentary sharpness. "I've never been an unthrifty woman, I'm bauld to say;

but every mutchkin of milk maun double itself now, for my bairns' sakes."

"Na, mem," said Marget, touched on her honour, "it canna weel do that; but you ken yoursel', if you had ta'en my advice, the byre might have been mair profit years ago. Better milkers are no' in a' the Lowdens; and if you sell Crummie's cauf, as I aye advised—"

"You're aye very ready with your advice, my woman. I never meant any other thing," said the Mistress, with some impatience; "but after this, the house of Norlaw maun even get a puir name, if it must be so; for I warn ye baith, my thoughts are upon making siller; and when I put my mind to a thing, I canna do it by halves."

"Then, mother, you must, in the first place, do something with me," said Cosmo. "I'm the only useless person in the house."

"Useless, laddie!—hold your peace!" said the Mistress. "You're but a bairn, and you're tender, and you maunna make a profit-

less beginning till you win to your strength. Huntley and Patie—blessings on them!—were both strong callants in their nature, and got good time to grow; and I'll no' let my youngest laddie lose his youth. Eh, Cosmo, my man! if you were a lassie, instead of their brother, thae twa laddies that are away could not be mair tender of you in their hearts!"

A flush came over Cosmo's face, partly gratified affection, partly a certain shame.

"But I'll soon be a man," he said, in a low and half-excited tone; "and I cannot be content to wait quietly at home when my brothers are working. I have a right to work as well."

"Bless the bairn!" cried Marget, once more involuntarily.

"Dinna speak nonsense," said the Mistress. There's a time for everything; and because I'm bereaved of twa, is that a reason my last bairn should leave me? Fie, laddie! Patie's eighteen—he's come the length of a man—

there's a year and mair between him and you. But what I was speaking of was the kye. There's nae such stock in the country as the beasts that are reared at Tyneside; and I mean to take a leaf out of Mr. Blackadder's book, if I'm spared, and see what we can do at Norlaw."

"Eh, Mistress, Mr. Blackadder's a man in his prime!" cried Marget.

"Weel, you silly haverel, what am I? Do you think a man that's labouring just for good name and fame, and because he likes it, and that has nae kin in the world but a far-away cousin, should be stronger for his wark than a widow-woman striving for her bairns?" cried the Mistress, with a hasty tear in her eye, and a quick flush on her cheek; "but I'll let you a' see different things, if I'm spared, in Norlaw."

While she spoke with this flush of resolution, they came in sight of their home; but it was not possible to see the westerly sunshine

breaking through those blank eyes of the old castle, and the low, modern house standing peacefully below, those unchanged witnesses of all the great scenes of all their lives, without a strain of heart and courage, which was too much for all of them. To enter in, remembering where the father took his rest, and how the sons began their battle—to have it once more pierced into the depths of her heart, that, of all the family once circling her, there remained only Cosmo, overpowered the Mistress, even in the midst of her new purpose, with a returning agony. She went in silent, pressing her hand upon her heart. It was a sad coming home.

## CHAPTER II.

“AND so you’re the only one of them left at home?” said Bowed Jaacob, looking up at Cosmo from under his bushy brows, and pushing up his red cowl off his forehead.

And there could not have been a more remarkable contrast of appearance than between this slight, tall, fair boy and the swart little demon, who considered him with a scientific curiosity, keen, yet not unkindly, from the red twilight of the blacksmith’s shop.

“I should be very glad not to be left at home,” said Cosmo, with a boyish flush of

shame; “and it will not be for long, if I can help it.”

“Weel, I’ll no’ say but ye a’ show a good spirit—a very good spirit, considering your up-bringing,” said Jaacob, “which was owre tender for laddies. I’ve little broo, for my ain part, of women’s sons. We’re a’ that, mair or less, doubtless, but the less the better, lad. I kent little about mothers and such-like when I was young mysel’.”

“They say,” said Cosmo, who, in spite of his sentiment, had a quick perception of humour, and was high in favour with the little Cyclops, “they say you were a fairy, and frightened everybody from your cradle, Jaacob, and that your mother fainted with fear when she saw you first—is it true?”

“True!—ay, just as true as a’ the rest,” said Jaacob. “They’ll say whatever ye like that’s marvellous, if ye’ll but listen to them. A man o’ sense is an awfu’ phenomenon in a place like this. He’s no’ to be ac-



counted for by the common laws o' nature; that's the philosophy of the maitter, Cosmo. *You're* owre young yet to rouse them; but they'll make their story, or a's one—take my word for it—of a lad of genius like yoursel'."

"Genius, Jaacob!"

The boy's face grew red with a sudden, violent flush; and an intense, sudden light shone in his dark eyes. He did not laugh at the compliment—it awoke some powerful sentiment of vanity or self-consciousness in his own mind. The lighting-up of his eyes was like a sudden gleam upon a dark water—a revelation of a hundred unknown shadows and reflections which had been there unrevealed for many a day before.

"Ay, genius. I ken the true metal when I hear it ring," said Jaacob. "Like draws to like, as ony fool can tell."

And then the boy turned away with a sudden laugh—a perfectly mirthful, pure utter-

ance of the half-fun, half-shame, and wholly ludicrous impression which this climax made upon him.

Strangely enough, Jaacob was not offended. He went on, moving about the red gloom of his workshop, without the slightest appearance of displeasure. He had no idea that the lad whom he patronised could laugh at him.

“I cannot say but I’m surprised at your brother for a’ that,” said Jaacob. “Huntley’s a lad of spirit; but he should have stood up to Me’mar like a man.”

“Do you know about Me’mar, too?” cried Cosmo, in some surprise.

“I reckon I do; and maist things else,” said Jaacob, drily. “I’m no’ vindictive mysel’, but when a man does me an ill turn, I’ve a real good disposition to pay him back. He aye had a grudge against the late Norlaw, this Aberdeenawa’ man; and if *I* had been your faither, Cosmo, lad, I’d have fought the hail affair to the last, though it cost me every

bodle I had; for wha does a' the land and the rights belong to, after all?—to *her*, and no' to him!”

“Did you know her?” asked Cosmo, breathlessly, not perceiving, in his eager curiosity, how limited Jaacob's real knowledge of the case was.

“Ay,” said Jaacob; and the ugly little demon paused, and breathed from his capacious lungs a sigh, which disturbed the atmosphere of the smithy with a sudden convulsion. Then he added quietly, and in an undertone, “I had a great notion of her mysel’.”

“You!” said Cosmo.

The boy did not know whether to fall upon his companion with sudden indignation, and give him a hearty shake by his deformed shoulders, or to retire with an angry laugh of ridicule and resentment. Both the more violent feelings, however, merged into the unmitigated amazement with which Cosmo at last

gazed at the swarthy hunchback, who had ventured to lift his eyes to Norlaw's love.

"And what for no' me?" said Jaacob, sturdily; "do ye think it's good looks and nought else that takes a woman's e'e? do you think I havena had them in my offer as weel favoured as Mary Huntley? Na, I'll do them this justice; a woman, if she's no' a downright haverel, kens a man of sense when she sees him. Mony a wiselike woman has cast her e'e in at this very smiddy; but I'm no' a marrying man."

"You would have made many discontented, and one ungrateful," said the boy, laughing. "Is that what kept you back, Jaacob?"

"Just that," said the philosopher, with a grim smile; "but I had a great notion of Miss Mary Huntley; she was aulder than me; that's aye the way with callants; ye'll be setting your heart on a woman o' twenty yoursel'. I'd have gane twenty miles a-foot, wet or dry, just to shoe her powny; and I wouldna

have let her cause gang to the wa', as your father did, if it had been me."

"Was she beautiful? what like was she, Jacob?" cried Cosmo, eagerly.

"I cannot undertake to tell you just what she was like, a callant like you," said Jaacob; then the dark hobgoblin made a pause, drawing himself half into his furnace, as the boy could suppose. "She was like a man's first fancy," continued the little giant, abruptly, drawing forth a red-hot bar of iron, which made a fiery flash in the air, and lighted up his own swart face for the moment; "she was like the woman a lad sets his heart on, afore he kens the cheats of this world," he added, at another interval, with a great blow of his hammer, which made the sparks fly; and through the din and the flicker no further words came. Cosmo's imagination filled up the ideal. The image of Mary of Melmar rose angel-like out of the boy's stimulated fancy, and there was not even a single glimmer of

the grotesque light of this scene, to diminish the romantic halo which rose around his father's first love.

“As for me, if you think the like of me presumed in lifting his e'en,” said Jaacob, “I'll warn ye to change your ideas, my man, without delay; a' that auld trash canna stand the dint of good discussion and opinion in days like these. Speak about your glorious revolutions! I tell you, callant, we're on the eve of the real glorious revolution, the time when every man shall have respect for his neighbours—save when his neibor's a fool; nane o' your oligarchies for a free country; we're men, and we'll have our birthright; and do you think I'm heeding what a coof's ancestors were, when I ken I'm worth twa o' him—ay, or ten o' him!—as a' your bits o' lords and gentlemen will find as soon as we've The Bill.”

“An honourable ancestor is an honour to any man,” said Cosmo, firing with the pride of birth. “I would not take the half of the

county, if it was offered me, in place of the old castle at Norlaw."

"Well," said Jaacob, with a softening glance, "it's no' an ill sentiment that, I'll allow, so far as the auld castle gangs; but ony man that thinks he's of better flesh and bluid than me, no' to say intellect and spirit, on the strength of four old wa's, or the old rascals that thieved in them—I'll tell ye, Cosmo, my lad, I think he's a fool, and that's just the short and the long o' the affair."

"Better flesh and blood, or better intellect and spirit!" said the boy, with a half-meditative, half-mirthful smile. "Homer was a beggar, and so was Belisarius, and so was Blind Harry, of Wallace's time."

This highly-characteristic, schoolboyish, and national confusion of heroes, moved the blacksmith-philosopher, with no sensation of the absurd. Homer and Blind Harry were by no means unfit companions in the patriotic conception of Bowed Jaacob, who, nevertheless, knew Pope's

Homer very tolerably, and was by no means ignorant of the pretensions of the “blind old man of Scio’s rocky isle.”

“A feesical disqualification, Cosmo, is quite a different matter,” said Jacob; “nae man could make greater allowance for the like of that than me, that might have been supposed at one time to be on the verge of it mysel’.”

And as he spoke, his one bright eye twinkled in Jaacob’s head with positive scintillations, as if Nature had endowed it with double power to make up for its solitude.

“The like of Homer and Blind Harry, however, belong to a primitive age,” said Jacob, “the minstrel crew were aye vagrants—no’ to say it was little better than a kind of a servile occupation at the best, praises of the great. But the world’s wiser by this time. I would not say I would make the Bill final, mysel’, but let’s aince get it, laddie, and ye’ll see a change. We’ll hae nae mair o’ your lordlings



in the high places—we'll have naething but *men*."

"Did you ever hear anything, Jacob," said Cosmo, somewhat abruptly—for the romantic story of his kinswoman was more attractive to the boy's mind than politics—"of where the young lady of Me'mar went to, or who it was she married? I suppose not, since she was searched for so long."

"No man ever speered at me before, so far as I can mind," said Jaacob, with a little bitterness; "your father behoved to manage the haill business himsel', and he was na great hand. I'm no' fond of writers when folk can do without them, but they're of a certain use, nae doubt, like a' ither vermin; a sharp ane o' them would have found Mary Huntley, ye may take my word for that. I was aince in France mysel'."

"In France?" cried Cosmo, with undeniable respect and excitement.

"Ay, just that," said Jaacob, dryly; "it's

nae such great thing, though folk make a speech about it. I wasna far in-ower. I was at a bit seaport place on the coast. Dieppe they ca' it, and deep it was to an innocent lad like what I was at the time—though I could haud my ain with maist men, baith then and at this day."

"And you saw there?"—cried Cosmo, who became very much interested.

"Plenty of fools," said Jaacob, "and every wean in the streets jabbering French, which took me mair aback than onything else I either heard or saw; but there was ae day a lady past me by. I didna see her face at first, but I saw the bairn she had in her hand, and I thought to mysel' I could not but ken the foot, that had a ring upon the path like siller bells. I gaed round about, and round about, till I met her in the face, but whether it was her or no' I canna tell; I stood straight afore her in the midroad, and she past me by with a glance, as if she kent nae me."

The tone in which the little hunchback uttered these words was one of indescribable yet suppressed bitterness. He was too proud to acknowledge his mortification. Yet it was clear enough, even to Cosmo, that this pride had not only prevented him from mentioning his chance meeting at the proper time, but that even now he would willingly persuade himself that the ungrateful beauty, who did not recognize him, could not be the lady of his visionary admiration.

“Do you think it was the Lady of Melmar?” asked the boy, anxiously, for Jacob’s “feelings,” though they had no small force of human emotion in them, were, for the moment, rather a secondary matter to Cosmo.

“If it had been her, she would have kent *me*,” said Vulcan, with emphasis, and he turned to his hammering with vehemence doubly emphatic. Jacob had no inclination to be convinced that Mary of Melmar might

forget him, who remembered her so well. He returned to the Bill, which was more or less in most people's thoughts in these days, and which was by no means generally uninteresting to Cosmo—but the boy's thoughts were too much excited to be amused by Jacob's politics; and Cosmo went home with visions in his mind of the quaint little Norman town, where Mary of Melmar had been seen by actual vision, and which henceforth became a region of dreams and fancy to her young knight and champion, who meant to seek her over all the world.

## CHAPTER III.

ERE the winter had fully arrived, visible changes had taken place in the house and steading of Norlaw. As soon as all the operations of the harvest were over, the Mistress dismissed all the men-servants of the farm, save two, and let, at Martinmas, all the richer portion of the land, which was in good condition, and brought a good rent. Closely following upon the ploughmen went Janet, the younger maid-servant, who obtained, to her great pride, but doubtful advantage, a place in a great house in the neighbourhood.

The Norlaw byres were enlarged and improved — the Norlaw cattle increased in number by certain choice and valuable specimens of “stock,” milch-kine, sleek and fair, and balmy-breathed. Some few fields of turnips and mangel-wurzel, and the rich pasture lands on the side of Tyne behind the castle, were all that the Mistress retained in her own hands, and with Marget for her factotum, and Willie Noble, the same man who had assisted in Norlaw’s midnight funeral, for her chief manager and representative out of doors, Mrs. Livingstone began her new undertaking.

She was neither dainty of her own hands, nor tolerant of any languid labour on the part of others. Not even in her youth, when the hopes and prospects of Norlaw were better than the reality ever became, had the Mistress shown the smallest propensity to adopt the small pomp of a landed lady. She was always herself, proud, high-spirited, somewhat arbitrary,

by no means deficient in a sense of personal importance, yet angrily fastidious as to any false pretensions in her house, and perceiving truly her real position, which, with all the added dignity of proprietorship, was still in fact that of a farmer's wife. All the activity and energy with which she had toiled all her life against her thriftless husband's unsteady grasp of his own affairs, and against the discouraging and perpetual unprosperity of many a year, were intensified now by the consciousness of having all her purposes within her own hand and dependent on herself. Naked and empty as the house looked to the eyes which had been accustomed to so many faces, now vanished from it, there began to grow an intention and will about all its daily work, which even strangers observed. Though the Mistress sat, as usual, by the corner window with her work in the afternoon, and the dining-parlour was as homelike as ever, and the neighbours saw

no change, except the change of dress which marked her widowhood, Marget, half ashamed of the derogation, half proud of the ability, and between shame and pride keeping the secret of these labours, knew of the Mistress's early toils, which even Cosmo knew very imperfectly; her brisk morning hours of superintendence and help in the kitchen and in the dairy, which, with all its new appliances and vigorous working, became "just a picture," as Marget thought, and the pride of her own heart. Out of the produce of those carefully-tended precious "kye," out of the sweet butter, smelling of Tyne gowans, and the rich, yellow curds of cheese, and the young, staggering, long-limbed calves which Willie Noble had in training, the Mistress, fired with a mother's ambition, meant to return ten-fold to Huntley his youthful self-denial, and even to lay up something for her younger sons.

It was still only fourteen years since the



death of the old Laird of Melmar, the father of the lost Mary ; and there was yet abundant time for the necessary proceedings to claim her inheritance, without fear of the limiting law, which ultimately might confirm the present possessor beyond reach of attack. The last arrangement made by Huntley had accordingly been, that all these proceedings should be postponed for three or four years, during which time the lost heiress might re-appear, or, more probable still, the sanguine lad thought, his own fortunes prosper so well, that he could bear the expense of the litigation without touching upon the little patrimony sacred to his mother. After so long an interval, a few years more or less would not harm the cause, and in the meantime every exertion was to be made by Cassilis, as Huntley's agent, for the discovery of Mary of Melmar. This was the only remaining circumstance of pain in the whole case to the Mistress. She could not help resenting everybody's

interest about this heiress, who had only made herself interesting by her desertion of that "home and friends," which, to the Mistress herself, were next to God in their all-commanding, all-engrossing claim. She was angry even with the young lawyer, but above all, angry that her own boys should be concerned for the rights of the woman who had forsaken all her duties so violently, and with so little appearance of penitence ; and if sometimes a thought of despondency and bitterness crossed the mind of the Mistress at night, as she sat sewing by the solitary candle, which made one bright speck of light, and no more, in the dim dining-room of Norlaw, the aggrieved feeling found but one expression. "I would not say now, but what after we've a' done our best—me among the beasts, and my laddie ower the seas, and the writers afore the Fifteen," were the words, never spoken, but often conceived, which rose in the Mistress's heart ; "I would not wonder but then,

when the land's gained and a's done, she'll come hame. It would be just like a' the rest!" And let nobody condemn the Mistress. Many a hardly-labouring soul, full of generous plans and motives, has seen a stranger enter into its labours, or feared to see it, and felt the same.

In the meantime, Cosmo, who had got all that the parish schoolmaster of Kirkbride—no contemptible teacher—could give him, had been drawing upon Dr. Logan's rusty Latin and Greek, rather to the satisfaction of the good minister than to his own particular improvement, and tired of reading everything that could be picked up in the shape of reading from the old parchment volumes of second-rate Latin divinity, which the excellent minister never opened, but had a certain respect for, down to the *Gentle Shepherd* and the floating ballad literature of the country side, began to grow more and more anxious to

emulate his brothers, and set out upon the world. The winter nights came on, growing longer and longer, and Cosmo scorched his fair hair and stooped his slight shoulders, reading by the firelight, while his mother worked by the table, and while the November winds began to sound in the echoing depths of the old castle. The house was very still of nights, and missed the absent sorely, and both the Mistress and her faithful servant were fain to shut up the house and go to rest as soon as it was seemly, a practice to which their early habits in the morning gave abundant excuse, though its real reason lay deeper.

“Ane can bear mony a thing in good daylight, when a’ the work’s in hand,” Marget said; “but womenfolk think lang at night, when there’ nae blythe step sounding ower the door, nor tired man coming hame.” And though she never said the same words, the same thought was in the Mistress’s heart.

One of these slow nights was coming tardily to a close, when Cosmo, who had been gathering up his courage, having finished his book on the hearth-rug, where the boy half sat and half reclined, rose suddenly and came to his mother at the table. Perhaps some similar thoughts of her own had prepared the Mistress to anticipate what he was about to say. She did not love to be forestalled, and, before Cosmo spoke, answered with some impatience to the purpose in his eye.

“I ken very well what you’re going to say. Weel, I wot the night’s lang, and the house is quiet—mair folk than you can see that,” said the Mistress, “and you’re a restless spirit, though I did not think it of you. Cosmo, do you ken what *I* would like you to do?”

“I could guess, mother,” said the boy.

“Ay, ’deed, and ye could object. I might have learnt that,” said his mother.

“I’ve got little of my ain will a’ my life, though a fremd person would tell you I was a positive woman. Most things I’ve set my heart on have come to nought. Norlaw’s near out of our hands, and Huntley and Patie are in the ends of the earth, and I’m a widow woman, desolate of my bairns; weel, weel, I’m no complaining — but when I saw you first in your cradle, Cosmo—you were the bonniest of a’ my bairns—I put my hands on your head, and I said to myself—‘I’ll make him my offering to the Lord, because he’s the fairest lamb of a’. Na, laddie—never mind, I’m no heeding. You needna put your arms round me. It’s near seventeen years ago, and mony a weary day since then, but I’ve aye thought upon my vow.”

“Mother, if I can, I’ll fulfil it!” cried Cosmo; “but how could I know your heart was in it, when you never spoke of it before?”

“Na,” said the Mistress, restraining herself with an effort. “I’ve done my

best to bring you up in the fear of the Lord, and it's no written that you maun be a minister, before you can serve Him. I'll no' put a burden on your conscience; but just I was a witless woman, and didna mind when I saw the bairn in the cradle that before it came that length, it would have a will of its own."

"Send me to college, mother!" said Cosmo, with tears in his eyes. "I have made no plans, and if I had I could change them—and at the worst, if we find I cannot be a minister, I will never forget your vow,—put your hands on my head and say it over again."

But when the boy knelt down at her side with the enthusiasm of his temper, and lifted his glowing, youthful face, full of a generous young emotion, which was only too generous and ready to be swayed by the influences of love, the Mistress could only bend over him with a silent burst of tenderness.

“God bless my dearest bairn !” she said at last, with her broken voice. “But no, no !—I’ve learned wisdom. The Lord make ye a’ his ain servants—every ane—I can say nae mair.”



## CHAPTER IV.

It was accordingly but a very short time after these occurrences when Cosmo, with his wardrobe carefully overlooked, his “new blacks” supplemented by a coarser every-day suit, which took the place of the jacket which the lad had outgrown, and a splendid stock of linen, home-made, snow-white and bleached on the gowans—took his way to Edinburgh in all the budding glory of a student. In these days few people had begun to speculate whether the Scotch Universities were or were not as good as the English ones, or what might be the characteristic differences of the

two. The academic glories of Edinburgh still existed in the fresh glories of tradition, if they had begun to decline in reality—and chairs were still held in the northern college by men at whose feet statesmen had learnt philosophy.

The manner in which Cosmo Livingstone went to college was not one, however, in which anybody goes to Maudlin or Trinity. The lad went to take up his humble lodging at Mrs. Purdie's in the High Street, and from thence dropped shyly to the college, paid his fees and matriculated, and there was an end of it. There were no rooms to look after, no tutors to see, no "men" to be made acquainted with. He had a letter in his pocket to one of the professors, and one to the minister of one of the lesser city churches. His abode was to be the same little room with the "concealed bed" and window overlooking the town, in which his mother had rested as she passed through Edinburgh, and the honest Kirkbride woman,

who was his landlady, had been already engaged at a moderate weekly rate to procure all that he wanted for him.

After which fashion, feeling very shy and lonely, somewhat embarrassed by the new coat which his mother called a surtoo and regarded with respect—dismayed by the necessity of entering shops and making purchases for himself, and standing a little in awe of the other students and of the breakfast to which the professor had invited him—Cosmo began the battle of his life.

He was now nearly seventeen, young enough to be left by himself in that little lantern and watch-house hanging high over the the picturesque heights and hollows of the beautiful old town, where the lad sat at his window in the winter evenings, watching the gorgeous frosty sunset, how it purpled with royal gleams and shadows all the low hills of Fife and shed a distant golden glow—sometimes a glow, redder and fiercer than gold—upon the chilly glories of

the Firth. Then, as the light faded from the western horizon, and Inchkeith and Inchcolm no longer stood out in vivid relief against the illuminated waters, how the lights of the town, scarcely less fairy-like, began to steal along the streets and to sparkle out in the windows, hanging in irregular lines from the many-storied houses at the other side of the North Bridge, and gleaming like glow-worms in the dark little valley between.

Cosmo sat at his window with a book in his hand, but did not read much—perhaps the lad was not thinking much either, as he sat in the silent little room, listening to all the voices of all the population beneath him, which rose in a softened swell of sound to his high window; sometimes mournful, sometimes joyful, sometimes with a sharp cry in it like an appeal to God, sometimes full of distinct tones, inarticulate yet individual, sometimes sweet with the hum of children—a great, full, murmuring chorus never entirely

silenced, in which the heart of humanity seemed, somehow, to betray itself, and reveal unawares the unspeakable blending of emotions which no one man can ever confess for himself.

Cosmo, who had spent a due portion of his time in his class-room, had taken notes of the lectures, and been, if not a remarkably devoted, at least a moderately conscientious student, often found himself very unwilling to light the candle, and sometimes even let his fire go out, in the charmed idleness of his window-seat, which was so strangely different from his old meditative haunt in the old castle, yet which absorbed him even more—and then Mrs. Purdie would come in with brisk good-humour, and rate him soundly for sitting in the dark, and make up the much-enduring northern coals into a blaze for him, and sweep the hearth, and light the candle, and bring in the little tray with its little teapot and blue and white cup and saucer, and

the bread and butter—which Cosmo did full justice to, in spite of his dreams. When she came to remove the things again, Mrs. Purdie would stand with one arm a-kimbo to have a little talk with her young lodger ; perhaps to tell him that she had seen the Melrose courier, or met somebody newly arrived by the coach from Kirkbride, or encountered an old neighbour, who “speered very kindly” for his mother ; or, on the other hand, to confide to him her fear that the lad from the Highlands in her little garret overhead, who provided himsel’, would perish with cauld in this frosty weather, and was just as like as no’ to starve himsel’, and didna keep up a decent outside, puir callant, without mony a sair pinch that naebody kent onything about ; or that her other lodger, who was also a student, was in a very ill way, coming in at a’ the hours of the night, and spending hardwon siller, and that she would be very glad to let his father and mother ken, but it didna become her to telltales.

These, and a great many other communications of the same kind, Mrs. Purdie relieved her mind by making to Cosmo, whose youth and good-looks and local claims upon her regard, made him a great favourite with the kind-hearted, childless woman, who compounded "scones" for his tea, and even occasionally undertook the trouble of a pudding, "a great fash and fyke," as she said to herself, puddings being little in favour with humble Scotchwomen of her class.

Under the care of this motherly attendant, Cosmo got on very well in his little Edinburgh lodging, and even in some degree enjoyed the solitude which was so new and so strange to the home-bred boy. He used to sally out early in the morning, perhaps to climb as far as St. Anthony's Chapel, or mount the iron ribs of the Craggs, to watch the early mists breaking over the lovely country, and old Edinburgh rising out of the

cloud like a Queen—or perhaps only to hasten along the cheerful length of Princes Street, when the same mists parted from the crags of the castle, or lay white in the valley. The boy knew nothing about his own sentiments, what manner of fancies they were, and did not pause to enquire whether anyone else thought like him. He hurried in thereafter to breakfast, fresh and blooming, and then with his books to college, encountering often enough that grave, gaunt Highlander in the garret, who had no time for poetic wanderings, and perhaps not much capacity, but who struggled on towards his own aim, with a desperate fortitude and courage, which no man of his name ever surpassed in a forlorn hope, or on a battle-field. The Highland student was nearly thirty, a man full grown and labour-hardened, working his way through his “humanity” and Divinity classes, looking forward, as the goal of his ambition, to some little Gaelic-speaking parish



in the far north, where some day, perhaps, the burning Celtic fervour, imprisoned under his slow English speech and impenetrable demeanour, might make him the prophet of his district; and as he entered day by day at the same academic gates, side-by-side with the seventeen-year-old boy, a strange tenderness for the lad came into the man's heart. They grew friends shyly yet warmly, unlike as they were, though Cosmo never was admitted to any of these secrets of his friend's *menage*, which Mrs. Purdie guessed at, but which Cameron would never have forgiven anyone for finding out; and next to the household of Norlaw, and the strange, half-perceived knowledge that came stealing to his mind, like a fairy, in his vigils by his window, Cameron was Cosmo's first experience of what he was to meet in life.

The Highlander lived in his garret, you could not believe or understand how, gentleman-commoner—and would have tossed, not only your

shoes, but you out of his high window, had you tried to be benevolent to him, as you tried it once to that clumsy sizar of Pembroke ; notwithstanding, he was no ignoble beginning for a boy's friendship, a fact which Cosmo Livingstone had it in him to perceive.

## CHAPTER V.

“I MEAN to call on Miss Logan at the manse to-day,” said Patricia Huntley, as she took her place with great dignity in “the carriage,” which she had previously employed Joanna to bully Melmar into ordering for her conveyance. Mrs. Huntley was too great an invalid to make calls, and Aunt Jean was perfectly impracticable as a companion, so Patricia armed herself with her mother’s card-case, and set out alone.

Alone, save for the society of Joanna, who was glad enough of a little locomotion, but did not much enjoy the call-

making portion of the enterprise. Joanna, whom no pains, it was agreed, could persuade into looking genteel, had her red hair put up in bows under her big bonnet, and a large fur tippet on her shoulders. Her brown merino frock was short, as Joanna's frocks invariably became after a few weeks' wearing; and the abundant display of ankle appearing under it said more for the strength than the elegance of its proprietor. Patricia, for her part, wore a coloured silk cloak, perfectly shapeless, and as long as her dress, with holes for her arms, and a tippet of ermine to complete it. It was a dress which was very much admired, and "quite the fashion" in those days; when the benighted individuals who wore such vestments actually supposed themselves as well-dressed as *we* have the comfort of knowing ourselves now.

"For I am sure," said Patricia, as they drove along towards Kirkbride, "that there

is some mystery going on. I am quite sure of it. I never will forget how shamefully papa treated me that day Mr. Cassilis was at Melmar—before a stranger and a gentleman too! and you know as well as I do, Joanna, how often that poor creature, Whitelaw, from Melrose, has been at our house since then.”

“Yes, I know,” said Joanna, carelessly. “I wonder what Katie Logan will say when she knows I’m going to school?”

“What a selfish thing you are, always thinking about your own concerns,” said Patricia; “do you hear what I say? I think there’s a mystery—I’m sure there’s a secret—either papa is not the right proprietor, or somebody else has a claim, or there’s something wrong. He is always making us uncomfortable some way or other; wouldn’t it be dreadful if we were all ruined and brought to poverty at the end?”

“Ruined and brought to poverty? it would be very good fun to see what mamma

and you would do," cried the irreverent Joanna. "*I* could do plenty things ; but I'm no' feared—its you that's always reading story-books."

"It's not a story-book; I almost heard papa say it," said Patricia, reddening slightly.

"Then you've been listening!" cried her bolder sister. "I would scorn to do that. I would ask him like a man what it was, if it was me, but I wouldna go stealing about the passages like a thief. I wouldna do it for twice Melmar—nor for all the secrets in the world!"

"I wish you would not be so violent, Joanna! my poor nerves cannot stand it," said Patricia; "a thoughtless creature like you never looks for any information, but I'm older, and I know we've no fortunes but what papa can give us, and we need to think of ourselves. Think, Joanna, if you can think. If anybody were to take Melmar from papa, what would become of you and me?"

"You and me!" the girl cried, in great

excitement. "I would think of Oswald and papa himsel', if it was true. Me! I could nurse bairns, or keep a school, or go to Australia, like Huntley Livingstone. I'm no' feared! and it would be fun to watch *you*, what you would do. But if papa had cheated anybody and was found out—oh, Patricia! could you think of yourself instead of thinking on that?"

"When a man does wrong, and ruins his family, he has no right to look for anything else," said Patricia.

"I would hate him," cried Joanna, vehemently, "but I wouldna forsake him—but it's all havers; we've been at Melmar almost as long as I can mind, and never anyone heard tell of it before."

"I mean to hear what Katie Logan says—for Mr. Cassilis is her cousin," said Patricia. "and just look, there she is, on the road, tying little Isabel's bonnet. She's just as sure to be an old maid as can be—look

how prim she is ! and never once looking to see what carriage it is, as if carriages were common at the manse. Don't call her Katie, Joanna ; call her Miss Logan ; I mean to show her that there is a difference between us and the minister's daughter of Kirkbride."

"And I mean no such thing," cried Joanna, with her head half out at the window ; "she's worth the whole of us put together, except Oswald and Auntie Jean. Katie ! Katie Logan ! we're going to the manse to see you —oh don't run away !"

The day was February, cold but sunny, and the manse parlour was almost as bright in this wintry weather as it had been in summer. The fire sparkled and crackled with an exhilaration in the sound as well as the warmth and glow it made, and the sunshine shone in at the end window, through the leafless branches, with a ruddy wintry cheerfulness, which brightened one's thoughts like good news or a positive



pleasure. There were no stockings or pinafores to be mended, but instead, a pretty covered basket, holding all Katie's needles and thread, and scraps of work in safe and orderly retirement, and at the bright window, in an old-fashioned china flower-pot, a little group of snowdrops, the earliest possibility of blossom, hung their pale heads in the light. Joanna Huntley threw herself into the minister's own easy-chair with a riotous expression of pleasure.

"Fires never burn as if they liked to burn in Melmar," cried Joanna ; " oh, Katie Logan, what do you do to yours? for everything looks as if something pleasant happened here every day."

"Something pleasant is always happening," said Katie, with a smile.

"It depends upon what people think pleasure," said Patricia. "I am sure you that have so much to do, and all your little

brothers and sisters to look after, and no society, should be worse off than me and Joanna; but it's very seldom that anything pleasant happens to us."

"Never mind her, Katie. Listen to me. I'm going to Edinburgh to school," cried Joanna. "I don't know whether to like it or to be angry. What would you do, if you were me?"

"I don't think I could fancy myself you, Joanna," said Katie, laughing; but I should have liked it when I was younger, and had less to do. I'm to go in with papa if he goes to the assembly this May. We have friends in Edinburgh, and I like it for that—besides the assembly and all the the things country folk see there."

"But Edinburgh is a very poor place after being in London," said Patricia; "if you could only see Clapham, where *I* was at school! But Mr. Cassilis is a cousin of yours—is he not? I suppose he told you

how papa behaved to me when he was last at Melmar."

"No, indeed—he did not," said Katie, with some curiosity.

"Oh! I thought perhaps he noticed it, being a stranger," said Patricia; "do you know what was his business with papa?"

"No."

"You might tell *us*—for we ought to hear, if it is anything important," said Patricia; and as for papa, he never lets us know anything till everybody else has heard it first. I am sure it was some business, and business which made papa as cross as possible; do tell us what it was."

"I don't know anything about it," said Katie. "My cousin staid here only two or three days, and he never spoke of business to me."

"Oh! but you know what he came here about," insisted Patricia.

“He came to see us, and also—oh yes—to manage something for the Livingstones, of Norlaw,” said Katie, with a slight increase of colour.

For the moment she had actually forgotten this last and more important reason for the visit of the young lawyer, having a rather uncomfortable impression that “to see us” was a more urgent inducement to Cousin Charlie than it had better be. She paused accordingly with a slight embarrassment, and began to busy herself opening her work-basket. Patricia Huntley was not a person of the liveliest intelligence in general, but she was quicksighted enough to see that Katie stumbled in her statement, and drew up her small shoulders instantly with two distinct sentiments of jealous offence and disapproval, the first relating to the presumption of the minister’s daughter in appropriating the visit of Cassilis to herself, and the second to a suggestion of the possible

rivalry, which could affect the house of Melmar in the family of Norlaw.

“I think we are never to be done with these Livingstones,” cried Patricia, “and all because the old man owed papa a quantity of money. *We* can’t help it when people owe us money, and I am sure I am very much surprised at Mr. Cassilis, if he came to annoy papa about a thing like that. I thought he was a gentleman! I thought it must be something important he came to say.”

“Perhaps it might be,” said Katie, quietly, colouring rather more, but losing her embarrassment; “and the more important it was, the less likely is it that my cousin would tell to any one whom it did not concern. Mr. Huntley could answer your questions better than I.”

“Oh, I see you’re quite offended. I see you’re quite offended. I am sure I did not know Mr. Cassilis was any particular

kind of cousin," said Patricia, spitefully. "If I had known I should have taken care how I spoke; but if my papa was like yours, and was not very able to afford a housekeeper, it would need to be another sort of man from Mr. Cassilis who could make *me* go away and leave my home."

"Katie, you should flyte upon her," said Joanna. "She does not understand anything else—never mind her—talk to me—are all the Livingstones away but Cosmo? Patricia thinks there's a mystery, and papa's wronged somebody. If he has, it's Norlaw."

"I don't think anything of the sort—hold your tongue, Joanna," said her sister.

"Eh, what else?" cried the young lady, roused to recrimination. "Katie, do you think Mrs. Livingstone knows? for I would go and ask her in a minute. I would not forsake papa if he was poor, but if

he's wronged anybody, I'll no' stand it—for it would be my blame as well as his the moment I knew!"

"I don't think you have anything to do with it," said Katie, with spirit, "nor Patricia either. Girls were not set up to keep watch over their fathers and mothers; are you the constable at Melmar, Joanna, to keep everybody in order? I wish you were at the manse sometimes when the boys have a holiday. Our Johnnie would be a match for you. The Livingstones are all away,—Cosmo, too; he's gone to college in Edinburgh, and some day, perhaps, you'll hear him preach in Kirkbride."

"I am quite sure papa would not give him the presentation; he's promised it to a cousin of our own," said Patricia, eagerly.

Katie grew very red, and then very pale.

"My father is minister of Kirkbride," she said, with a great deal of simple

dignity; "there is no presentation in anybody's power just now."

"Katie, I wish you would not speak to her, she's a cat!" cried Joanna, with intense disgust, turning her back upon her sister; "oh I wish you would write Cosmo to come and see me! I'll be just the same as at college too; and I'm sure I'll like him a great deal better than any of the girls. Or, never mind; if that's not right, I'll be sure to meet him in the street. I'm to go next week, Katie, and there's a French governess and a German master, and an Italian master, and nothing but vexation and trouble. It's quite true, and we're not even to speak our own tongue, but jabber away at French from morning to night. English is far better—I know I'll quarrel with them a'."

"Do you call your language English, Joanna?" said her sister, with contempt.

"If it's no' English it's Scotch, and



that's far better," cried Joanna, with an angry blush; "wha cares for English? they never say their r's and their h's, except when they shouldna say them, and they never win the day except by guile, and they canna do a thing out of their own head till Scotsmen show them how! and it's a' true, and I'd rather be a servant-maid in Melmar, than one of your Clapham fine ladies, so you needna speak your English either to Katie or me."

And it must be confessed that Katie, sensible as she was, laughed, but applauded. and that poor little Patricia, who could find nothing heroical to say on behalf of Clapham, was very much disposed to cry with vexation, and only covered her defeat by a retreat to the carriage, where Joanna followed, only after a few minutes' additional conversation with Katie, who was by no means disposed to aid the elder sister. When they were gone, however, Katie

Logan shook her wise little elder-sisterly head over the pair of them. She thought if Charlie (which diminutive in the manse meant Charlotte) and Isabel grew up like Patricia and Joanna, she would "break her heart;" and the little mistress of the manse went into the kitchen to oversee the progress of a birthday-cake and give her homely orders, without once thinking of the superior grandeur of the carriage, as it rolled down the slope of the brae and through the village, the scene of a continued and not very temperate quarrel between the two daughters of Melmar, which was only finished at last by the sudden giving way of Patricia's nerves and breath, to the most uncomfortable triumph of Joanna. Joanna kept sulkily in her corner, and refused to alight while the other calls were made. On the whole, it was not a very delightful drive.

## CHAPTER VI.

THREE months later, in the early sweetness of May, Cosmo Livingstone stood upon an "outside stair," one of those little flights of stone steps, clearing the half-cellar shops of the lowest story, which are not unfrequent in the High Street of Edinburgh, and which make a handy platform when anything is to be seen, or place of refuge when anything is to be escaped from. A little further down, opposite to him, was the Tron Church, with its tall steeple striking up into the sunny mid-day heavens; and above, at a little distance, the fleecy white clouds hung over the open

crown of St. Giles's, with the freshness of recent rain. Many bystanders stood on the other "stair-heads," and groups of heads looked out from almost every window of the high houses on every side. The High Street of Edinburgh, lined with expectant lookers-on, darkening downwards towards the picturesque slope of the Canongate, with its two varied and noble lines of lofty old houses, black with time, between which the sunshine breaks down in a moted and streamy glory, as into a well, is no contemptible object among street sights; and the population of Edinburgh loves its streets as perhaps only the populations of places rich in natural beauty can love them. A man who has seen a crowd in the High Street might almost be tempted to doubt, indeed, whether the Scottish people were really so reserved and grave and self-restraining as common report pronounces them. The women on the landings of the stairs shrilly claiming here and there

a Tam or a Sandy, or else discussing in chorus the event of the moment; the groups of men promenading up and down upon the pavement with firmset mouth and gleaming eyes—the mutter of forcible popular sentiment saying rather more than it means, and saying that in the plainest and most emphatic words; and the stir of general excitement in a scene which has already various recollections of tumults which are historical, make altogether a picturesque and striking combination, which is neither like a Parisian mob nor a London one, yet is quite as characteristic as either. It was not, however, a mob on this day, when Cosmo Livingstone stood on the stair-head in front of a little bookseller's shop, the owner of which, in high excitement, came every minute or two to the door, uttering vehement little sentences to the little crowd on his steps:—

“ We'll have it oot o' them if we have to gang to St. Stephen's very doors for't ! ”

cried the shopkeeper. "King William had better mind his crown than mind his wife. We're no to lose the Bill for a German whimsey. Hey, laddies! dinna make so muckle clatter—they're coming! do ye hear them?"

They were coming, as the increased hum and cluster of the by-standers told clearly enough—an extraordinary procession of its kind. Without a note of music, without a tint of colour, with a tramp which was not the steady tramp of trained footsteps, but only the sound of a slowly-advancing crowd, to which immense excitement gave a kind of solemnity—a long line of men in their common dress, unornamented, unattended, keeping a mysterious silence, and carrying a few flags, black, and with ominous devices, which only the strain of a great climax of national feeling could have suffered to pass without that ridicule which is more fatal than state prosecutions. Nobody laughed, so far as we are aware, at the skulls and cross-bones of

this voiceless procession ; and the tramp of that multitude of men, timed and cheered by no music, broken by no shouts, lightened by no gleam of weapons, or glitter of emblems, or variety of colour, and only accompanied by the agitated hum of the by-standers, had a very remarkable and somewhat “gruesome” impressiveness. The people who were looking on grew silent gradually, and held their breath as the long train went slowly past. It might not be a formidable band. *Punch*—if *Punch* had been in those days—might very likely have found a comfortable amount of laughter in the grim looks of the processionists, who were not likely to do much in justification of their deadly-looking flags. But the occasion was a remarkable occasion in the national history ; the excitement was such—so general and overpowering—as no subsequent agitation has been able to equal. The real force of popular emotion in it covered even its own mock-heroics, which is

no small thing to say, and there was something solemn in the unanimity of so many sober persons who were not under the immediate sway and leadership of any demagogue, nor could be supposed to look for personal advantages, and whose extreme fervour and excitement at the same time were not revolutionary, but simply political. The "Bill," on which the popular hope had fixed itself, had just met with one of its failures, and this was the exaggerated, yet expressive way in which the Edinburgh crowd demonstrated the popular sentiment of the day.

These things cannot be judged in cold blood—at that time everybody was excited. Cosmo Livingstone, white with boyish fervour, watched and counted them as they passed with irresistible exclamations—"twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, a hundred!" the boy cried aloud with triumph, as score after score went past, and the women on the lower steps of the stair began to share his calculations



and exult in them. The very children beneath, who were looking on with restless and excited curiosity, knew something about the "Bill," which day by day, as the coach from the south, with the London mails, came in, they had been sent to learn tidings of—and the bookseller in the little shop could not restrain himself.

"There will be news of this!" he cried as the last detachment passed; "when the men of Edinburgh take up a matter, nothing can stand before them. There ne'er was a march like it that I ever heard o' in a' my reading. Kings, Lords and Commons—I defy them to stand against it—how many?—hurra for Auld Reekie! Our lads, when they do a thing, never make a fool o't. Hark to the tramp of them! man—its grand!

"I've seen the sodgers out for far less in my day," said an old woman.

"A snuff for the sodgers!" cried the excited shopkeeper, snapping his fingers; "'a

when mercenaries, selling their bluid for a trade. They daur nae mair face a band like that, than I dare face Munch Meg."

"Oh, Cosmo—Cosmo Livingstone!" cried a voice from below: "it's me—look this way!—do you no mind me?—I'm Joanna; come down this moment and tell us how we're to get home."

Cosmo looked down through the railings, close to the bottom of which the owner of the voice had been pressed by the crowd. She had a little silk umbrella in her hand, with the end of which, thrust between the rails, she was impatiently, and by no means lightly, beating upon his foot.

An elderly person looking very much frightened clung close to her arm, and a girl somewhat younger stood a little apart, looking with bright vivacious eyes and parted lips after the disappearing procession.

The swarm of lads, of idle women and children, who followed in the wake of the Re-

formers, as of every other march, had overwhelmed for a moment this little group, which was not like them—and the tumult of voices, which rose when the sight was over, made it difficult to hear even Joanna, clear, loud, and unhesitating as her claim was.

“Miss Huntley!” cried Cosmo, with a momentary start—but it was not so much to witness his recognition as to save his foot from further chastisement.

“It’s no’ Miss Huntley—it’s me!” cried Joanna, “we’ve lost our road—come and tell us how we’re to go. Oh, madame, don’t hold so fast to my arm!”

Cosmo made haste to swing himself down over the railings, when Joanna’s elderly companion immediately addressed herself to him in a long and most animated speech, which, unfortunately, however, was in French and entirely unintelligible to the poor boy. He blushed violently, and stood listening with a natural deference, but without the slightest hope of

comprehending her—making now and then a faint attempt to interrupt the stream. Joanna in the meantime, who was not a great deal more enlightened than he was, vainly endeavoured to stay the course of madame's eloquence by pulling her shawl and elbow.

“He does not understand you! he canna understand you!” cried Joanna, in words which the Frenchwoman comprehended as little as Cosmo did *her* address.

During this little episode, the other girl stood by with an evident impulse to laughter, and a sparkle of amusement in her black eyes. At last she started forward with a rapid motion, said something to madame which succeeded better than the remonstrances of Joanna, and addressed Cosmo in her turn.

“Madame says,” said the lively little stranger, “that she cannot understand your countrymen—that they are so grave, so

impassionate, so sorrowful, she knows not if they march in *le cortège funèbre* or go to make the barricades. Madame says there is no music—no shouts—no voice. She demands what the *jeune Monsieur* thinks of a, so grave, procession.”

“The men are displeased,” said Cosmo, hastily; “they think the government trifles with them, and they warn it how they feel. They don’t mean to make a riot, or break the peace—we call it a demonstration here.”

“A de-mon-stracion !” said the little Frenchwoman; “I shall look for it in my dictionary. They are angry with the king—*eh bien !*—why do not they fight?”

“Fight! they could fight the whole world if they liked!” cried Joanna; “but they would scorn to fight for everything like people that have nothing else to do. Desirée and I wanted to see it, Cosmo, and madame did not know in the least where we were bringing her to—and so we got into the crowd, and I don’t

know how to get back to Moray Place, unless you'll show us the way."

"Madame says," said the other girl, laughing, after receiving another vehement communication from the governess, that "*ce jeune monsieur* is to go with us only to Princes Street—then we shall find our own way. He is not to go with you, *belle* Joanna; and madame demands to know what all the people say."

"What all the people say! — they're gossiping, and scolding, and speaking about the procession, and about us, and about their own concerns, and about everything," said Joanna; "and how can I tell her? Oh, Cosmo, I've looked everywhere for you! but you never walk where we walk; and I saw your mother at the church, and I saw Katie Logan, and I told Katie to write you word to come and see me—but everybody teases us to death about being proper; however, come along, and I'll tell you all about everybody—

wasn't it grand to see the procession? Papa's a terrible Tory, and says it'll destroy the country—so I hope they'll get it. Are you for the Reform?"

"Yes," said Cosmo, but the truth was, the boy felt considerably embarrassed walking onward by the side of Joanna, with the governess and the little Frenchwoman behind, talking in their own language with a rapidity which made Cosmo dizzy, interrupted by occasional bursts of laughter from the girl, which he, being still very young and inexperienced, and highly self-conscious, could not help suspecting to be excited by himself—an idea which made him excessively awkward. However, Joanna trudged along, with her umbrella in one hand, and with the other holding up the skirt of her dress, which, however, was neither very long nor very wide. Joanna's tall figure might possibly be handsome some day—but it certainly wanted filling up and rounding in the meantime—and

was not remarkably elegant at present, either in garb or gait.

But her young companion was of a very different aspect. She was little, graceful, light, with a step which, even in the High Street, reminded Cosmo of Jaacob's bit of sentiment—"A foot that rang on the path like siller bells"—with sparkling black eyes, a piquant rosy mouth, and so bright and arch a look, that the boy forgave her for laughing at himself, as he supposed she was doing. Desirée!—there was a charm too in the strange foreign name which he could not help saying over to himself—and if Joanna had been less entirely occupied with talking to him, she could not have failed to notice how little he answered, and how gravely he conducted the party to Princes Street, from whence the governess knew her way. Joanna shook hands with Cosmo heartily at parting, and told him she should write to Katie Logan to say she had seen him—while Desirée made



him a pretty parting salutation, half a curtesy, with a mischievous glance out of her bright eyes, and madame made him thanks in excellent French, which the lad did not appreciate.

By that time, as he turned homeward, Cosmo had forgotten all about the procession, we are grieved to say, and was utterly indifferent to the fate of the "Bill."

He was quite confused in his thoughts, poor boy, as he betook himself to his little room and his high window. This half frolic, half adventure, which gave the two girls a little private incident to talk of, such as girls delight in, buzzed about Cosmo's brain with embarrassing pleasure. He felt half disposed to begin learning French on the instant—not that he might have a better chance of improving his acquaintance with Desirée—by no means—but only that he might never feel so awkward and so mortified again as he did to-day, when he found himself addressed in a language which he did not know.

## CHAPTER VII.

Cosmo saw nothing more of Joanna Huntley, nor of her bright-eyed companion for a long time. He fell back into his old loneliness, with his high window, and his landlady, and the Highland student for society. Cameron, whom the boy made theories about, and wistfully contemplated on the uncomprehended heights of his maturer age, knew a good deal by this time of the history of the Livingstones, a great deal more than Cosmo was aware of having told him, and had heard all about the adventure in the High Street, about Desirée's laugh and the

old French grammar which Cosmo had secretly bought at a book-stall.

“If she had only taken to Latin, as the philosophers used to do at the Reformation time,” cried Cosmo, with a little fun, and a great deal of seriousness, “but women never learn Latin now-a-days. Why shouldn’t they?”

“Does it do *us* so much good?” said Cameron, brushing a little dust carefully from the sleeve of that black coat of his, which it went to his heart to see growing rustier every day, and casting a momentary glance of almost envy at the workmen in their comfortable fustian jackets. Cameron was on his way to knock the “Rudiments” into the heads of three little boys, in whose service the gaunt Highlander tasted the sweets of “private tuition,” so that at the moment he had less appreciation than usual of the learning after which he had toiled all his life.

“If any one loves scholarship, you should!” cried Cosmo, with a little enthusiasm.

“Why?” said the elder man, turning round upon him with a momentary gleam of proud offence in his eye. The Highlander wanted no applause for the martyrdoms of his life. On the contrary, it galled him to think that his privations should be taken into account by any one as proofs of his love of learning. His strong, absolute, self-denying temper wanted that last touch of frankness and candour which raises the character above detraction and above narrowness. He could not acknowledge his poverty, and take his stand upon it boldly. It was a necessity of his nature to conceal what he could manfully endure. But the glance which rested on Cosmo softened.

“Letters may be humane and humanizing, Cosmo,” said the Highland student,

with a little humour; “but I doubt if men feel this particular influence of them in teaching little callants. I don’t think, in a general way, that either my genteel boys in Fette’s Row, or my little territorial villains in St. Mary’s Wynd, improve *my* humanity.”

“Yet the last, at least, is purely a voluntary office and labour of love,” said Cosmo, earnestly.

Cameron smiled.

“I’m but a limited man,” he said; “love takes but narrow bounds with the like of me. Two or three at the most are as many as my heart can hold. Are you horrified to hear it, Cosmo? I’ll do my neighbour a good turn if I can, and I’ll not think ill of him if I can help it; but love, laddie, love!—that’s for one friend—for a mother or—a wife—not for every common man or every bairn I see in the street and have com-

passion on. No! Love is a different concern."

"Is it duty, then?" said Cosmo, with a small shrug of his boyish shoulders.

"Hush! If I cannot love every man I see, I can love Him who loves all!" said the Highlander, raising his high head with an unconscious loftiness and elevation of gesture. Cosmo made no answer and no comment—he was awed for the moment with the personal reality of that heavenly affection which made this limited earthly man, strong in his own characteristic individualities, and finding it impossible to abound in universal tenderness, still do with fervour those works of the Evangelist which were for love of One who loved the all, whom he himself had not a heart expansive enough to love.

When Cameron arrived at the house of his pupils, Cosmo wandered back again towards the region of his friend's unrewarded labours;

—ah ! those young champions of Maudlin and Trinity !—what a difference between this picture and that. Let us confess that the chances are that Cameron, at the height of his hardly-earned scholarship, would still be a world behind a double-first ; and it is likely, unless sheer strength had done it, that nothing earthly could have made a stroke-oar of the Highlandman. If anyone could have watched him through the course of one of his laborious days, getting up to eat his rude and scanty breakfast, going out to his lecture and classes, from thence to one quarter and another to his pupils—little boys in the “ Rudiments ; ” from thence to St. Mary’s Wynd to do the rough pioneer evangelist work of a degraded district—work which perhaps his Divinity professor, perhaps the minister of his church urged upon him as the best preparation for his future office,—then home to his garret to a meal which he would not have liked any one to see or share, to labour over his notes, to read, to get up his college work

for the next day, to push forward, steadily, stoutly, silently, through almost every kind of self-denial possible to man.

Then, when the toilsome session was over, perhaps the weary man went home—not to Switzerland or Wales with a reading party—not to shoot, nor to fish, nor to travel, nor to give himself up to the pure delights of uninterrupted study—perhaps, instead, to return to weary days of manual labour, to the toils of the field, or the trials of the school-master ; or perhaps finding the expense of the journey too much for him, or thinking it inexpedient to risk his present pupils, lingered through the summer in Edinburgh, teaching, reading, pinching, refreshing himself by his work in St. Mary's Wynd. The result of all this was not an elegant divine, nor an accomplished man of the world—very possibly it might be an arbitrary optimist, a one-sided Christian—but it was neither an idle nor a useless man.



Some thoughts of this kind passed through the mind of Cosmo Livingstone as he went through the same St. Mary's Wynd, pondering the occupations and motives of his friend—the only comparison which he made, thinking of Cameron, was with himself; forgetting the difference of their age entirely, as such a boy was likely to do, Cosmo could not be sufficiently disgusted and discontented with his own dependence and worthlessness. Then he had, at the present moment, no particular vocation for the church. St. Mary's Wynd, so far from attracting him, even failed at this moment to convey to the visionary lad the sentiment which it wrote with words of fire upon the less sensitive mind of Cameron. Love for the inhabitants of those wretched closes—for the miserable squalid forms coming and going through those high, dark, narrow, winding stairs, down which sometimes a stray sunbeam, piercing through a dusty window, threw a violent

glory into the darkness, like a Rembrandt or an indignant angel, seemed something impossible. He believed in the universal love of the Lord, but it only filled him with awe and wonder—he did not understand it as Cameron did—and Cosmo could not see how reaching ultimately into the position of teaching, preaching, labouring, wearing out, for the benefit of such a population, was worth the terrible struggle of preparation which at present taxed all the energies of his friend. He repeated to himself dutifully what he had heard—that to save a soul was better than to win a kingdom—but such words were still only of the letter, and not of the spirit, for Cosmo. And he was glad at last to escape from the subject, and hasten to the fresh and breezy solitude of the hill, which was not a mile from this den of misery, yet seemed as far away as another world.

It was spring, and the air was full of that invigorating hopefulness, which was none the

worse to Cosmo for coming on a somewhat chilly breeze. The glory of the broad, blue Firth, with its islands and its bays, and the world of bright, keen, sunny air in which its few sails shone with a dazzling indescribable whiteness, like nothing but themselves—the round white clouds ranging themselves in lines and fantastic groups over the whole low varied line of the opposite coast—and the intoxication of that free, unbroken breeze, coming fresh over miles of country and leagues of sea, lifted Cosmo out of his former thoughts, only to rouse in him a vague heroical excitement—a longing after something, he knew not what, which any tangible shaping would but have vulgarised. The boy spread out his arms with an involuntary enthusiasm, drinking in that wine of youth. What would he do?—he stood upon the height of the hill like a young Mercury, ready to fly over all the world on the errands of the gods—but even the voice of Jupiter,

speaking out of the clouds, would only have been prose and bathos to the unconscious, unexplainable poetic elevation of the lad, who neither knew himself nor the world.

A word of any kind, even the sublimest, would have brought him to his feet and to a vague sense of shame and self-ridicule in a moment—which consummation happened to him before he was aware.

The word was a name, a name which he had only heard once before,—and the voice that spoke it was at some distance, for the sound came ringing to him, faint yet clear, brightened into a cry of pleasure by the breath of the hills on which it came. “*Désirée!*” The boy started, blushed at himself in the awaking of his dream, and pausing only a moment, rushed down the slope of Arthur’s Seat towards Duddingstone, where, on the first practicable road which he approached, he perceived a solemn procession of young ladies, two-and-two, duly officered and

governed, and behaving themselves irreproachably. Cosmo did not make a rush down through their seemly and proper ranks, to find out Desirée or Joanna; instead, the lad watched them for a moment, and then turned round laughing, and went back to his lodging—laughing the shame-faced rosy laugh of his years, when one can feel one has been a little ridiculous without feeling one's self much the worse for it, and when it strikes rather comically than painfully to find how different one's high-flown fancies are, to all the sober arrangements of the everyday world.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE end of the session arrived, and Cosmo came home, leaving his fellow-student, who would not even accept an invitation to Norlaw, behind him in Edinburgh. Cameron thought it half a weakness on his own part, the sudden affection to which the boy had moved him, but he would not yield so much to it as to lay himself under "an obligation," nor suffer anyone to suppose that any motive whatever, save pure liking, mingled in the unlikely friendship he had permitted himself to form. Inveterate poverty teaches its victims a strange suspiciousness; he was half

afraid that some one might think he wanted to share the comforts of Cosmo's home; so, as he was not going home himself, he remained in Edinburgh, working and sparing as usual, and once more expanding a little with the idea, so often proved vain hitherto, of getting so much additional work as to provide for his next session, leaving it free to its own proper studies; and Cosmo returned to rejoice the hearts of the women in Norlaw.

Who found him grown and altered, and "mair manlike," and stronger, and every way improved, to their heart's content. The Mistress was not given to caresses or demonstrations of affection—but when the lad got home, and saw his mother's eye brighten, and her brow clear every time she looked at him, he felt, with a compunction for his own discontented thoughts, of how much importance he was to the widow, and tried hard to restrain the instinct of wandering, which many circumstances had combined to strengthen in

his mind, although he had never spoken of it. Discontent with his present destination for one thing; the example of Huntley and Patrick; the perpetual spur to his energy which had been before him during all his stay in Edinburgh, in the person of Cameron; his eager visionary desire to seek Mary of Melmar, whom the boy had a strong fancy that *he* was destined to find; and, above and beyond all, a certain vague ambition, which he could not have described to anyone, but which lured him with a hundred fanciful charms—moved him to the new world and the unknown places, which charmed chiefly because they were new and unknown. Cosmo had written verses secretly for a year or two, and lately had sent some to an Edinburgh paper, which, miracle of fortune! published them. He was not quite assured that he was a poet, but he thought he could be something if he might but reach that big, glorious world which all young fancies long for, and the locality of which dazzling



impossible vision, is so oddly and so often placed in London. Cosmo was not sure that it was in London — but he rather thought it was not in Edinburgh, and he was very confident it could not be in Norlaw.

About the same time, Joanna Huntley came home for the long summer holidays. Joanna had persuaded her father into giving her a pony, on which she trotted about everywhere unattended, to the terror of her mother and the disgust of Patricia, who was too timid for any such impropriety. Pony and girl together, on their rambles, were perpetually falling in with Cosmo Livingstone, whom Joanna rather meant to make a friend of, and to whom she could speak on one subject which occupied, at the present time, two-thirds of her disorderly thoughts, and deafened, with perpetual repetition, the indifferent household of Melmar.

This was Desirée. The first of first loves for a girl is generally another girl, or young woman, a little older than herself; and nothing can surpass the devotion of the worshipper.

Desirée was only a year older than Joanna, but she was almost everything which Joanna was not; and she was French, and had been in Paris and London, and was of a womanly and orderly temper, which increased the difference in years. She was, for the time being, Joanna's supreme mistress, queen, and lady-love.

"I'm very glad you saw her, Cosmo," cried the girl, in one of their encounters, "because now you'll know that what I say is true. They laugh at me at Melmar; and Patricia (she's a cat!) goes on about her Clapham school, and says Desirée is only a little French governess—as if I did not know better than that!"

"Is she a governess?" asked Cosmo.

“She’s a lady!” said Joanna, reddening suddenly; “but she does not pay as much as we do; and she talks French with the girls, and sometimes she helps the little ones on with their music, and—but as for a governess like Madame, or like Miss Trimmer, or even Mrs. Payne herself—she is no more like one of them than you are. Cosmo, I think Desirée would like you!”

“Do you think so?” said Cosmo, with a boyish blush and laugh.

Joanna, however, was far too much occupied to notice his shamefacedness.

“I’ll tell you just what I would like,” she said, as they went on together, the pony rambling along at its own will, with the reins lying on its neck, while Cosmo, half-attracted, half-reluctant, walked by its side. “I don’t think I should tell you either,” said Joanna, “for I don’t suppose you care about us. Cosmo Livingstone, I

am sure, if I were you, I would hate papa; but you'll no' tell — I would like Desirée to come here and marry my brother Oswald, and be lady of Melmar. I would not care a bit what became of *me*. Though she's French, there's nobody like her; and that's just what I would choose, if I could choose for myself. Would it not be grand? But you don't know Oswald—he's been away nearly as long as I can mind; but he writes me letters sometimes, and I like him better than anybody else in the world."

"Where is he?" said Cosmo.

"He's in Italy. Whiles he writes about the places, whiles about Melmar; but he never seems to care for coming home," said Joanna. "However, I mean to write him to tell him he *must* come this summer. Your Huntley is away too. Isn't it strange to live at home always the same, and have so near a friend as a

brother far, far away, and never be able to know what he is doing? Oswald might be ill just now for anything we know; but I mean to write and tell him he must come to see Desirée, for that is what I have set my heart upon since I knew her first."

Joanna, for sheer want of breath, came to a pause; and Cosmo made no reply. He walked on, rather puzzled by the confidence she gave him, rather troubled by this other side of the picture—the young man in Italy, who very likely thought himself the unquestionable heir, perfectly entitled to marry and bring home a lady of Melmar. The whole matter embarrassed Cosmo. Even his acquaintance with Joanna, which was not of his seeking, seemed quite out of place and inappropriate. But the girl was as totally unconscious as the pony of the things called improprieties, and had

taken a friendship for Cosmo as she had taken a love for Desirée — partly because the house of Norlaw bore a certain romance to her fancy — partly because “papa would be mad” — and partly because, in all honesty, she liked the boy, who was not much older, and was certainly more refined and gentle than herself. Joanna was not remarkably amiable in her present development, but she could appreciate excellence in others.

“And she’s beautiful, too — don’t you think so?” said Joanna; “not pretty, like Patricia, nor bonnie, like Katie Logan — but beautiful. I wish I could bring her to Melmar—I wish Oswald could see her — and I’ll do anything in the world rather than let Desirée go to anybody’s house like any other governess. Isn’t it a shame? a delicate little lady like her has to go and teach little brats of children, and me that am strong and big, and could do lots

of things—I never have anything to do! I don't understand it—they say it's providence. I would not make things be like that if it was me. What do you think? You never say a word. I suppose you just listen, and laugh at me because I speak everything out. What for do you not speak like a man?"

"A man sometimes has nothing to say, Miss Huntley," said Cosmo, with a rather whimsical shyness, which he was half-inclined himself to laugh at.

"Miss Huntley!—I'm Joanna!" cried the girl, with contempt. "I would like to be friends with you, Cosmo, because papa behaved like a wretch to your father; and many a time I think I would like to come and help Mrs. Livingstone, or do anything for any of you. I canna keep in Melmar in a corner, and never say a word except to vex folk, like Patricia, and I canna be good, like Katie Logan. Do

you want to go away and no' to speak to me? You can if you like — I don't care! I know I'm no' like a lady in a ballad; but neither are you like one of the old knights of Norlaw!"

"Not if you think me rude, or dull, or ungrateful for your frankness!" cried Cosmo, touched by Joanna's appeal, and eager to make amends; but the girl pulled up the pony's reins, and darted away from him in mighty dudgeon, with the slightest touch of womanish mortification and shame heightening her childish wrath. Perhaps this was the first time it had really occurred to Joanna that, after all, there was a certain soul of truth in the proprieties which she hated, and that it might not be perfectly seemly to bestow her confidence, unasked, upon Cosmo — a confidence which was received so coldly.

She comforted herself by starting off at a pace as near a gallop as she and her



steed were equal to, leaving Cosmo rather disconcerted in his turn, and not feeling particularly pleased with himself, but with many thoughts in his mind, which were not there when he left Norlaw.

## CHAPTER IX.

DAY by day, the summer went over Cosmo's head, leaving his thoughts in the same glow and tumult of uncertainty, for which, now and then, the lad blamed himself bitterly, but which, on the whole, he found very bearable. Everything went on briskly at Norlaw. The Mistress, thoroughly occupied, and feeling herself at last, after so many unprosperous years, really making some forward progress, daily recovered heart and spirit, and her constant supervision kept everything alive and moving in the house. Here Cosmo filled

the place of natural privilege accorded to him alike as the youngest child and the scholar-son. Though the Mistress's heart yearned over the boys who were away, she expected to be most tenderly proud of Cosmo, whose kirk and manse she could already see in prospect.

It is not a very great thing to be a minister of the Church of Scotland, but, in former days at least, when the Church was less divided than it is now, the people of Scotland regarded with a particular tenderness of imagination the parish pastor. He was less elevated above his flock than the English rector, and sprang very seldom from the higher classes ; but even amongst wealthy yeomen families in the country, the manse was still a kind of *beau ideal* of modest dignity and comfort, the pride and favourite fancy of the people. It was essentially so to the Mistress, whose very highest desire it had been to

move her boy in this direction, and whose project of romance now, in which her imagination amused itself, was, above all other things, the future home and establishment of Cosmo. She had no idea to what extent her favourite idea was threatened in secret.

For the moment, however, Melmar and their connexion with that house seemed to have died out of everybody's mind save Cosmo's. It never could quite pass from his so long as he took his place at sunset in that vacant window of the old castle, where the ivy tendrils waved about him, and where the romance of Norlaw's life seemed to have taken up its dwelling. The boy could not help wandering over the new ground which Joanna had opened to him—could not help associating that Mary of Melmar, long lost in some unknown country, with Oswald Huntley, a stranger from home for years; and the boy started with a jealous pang of pain to

think how likely it was that these two might meet, and that another than his father's son should restore the inheritance to its true heir. This idea was galling in the extreme to Cosmo. He had never sympathised much in the thought that Melmar was Huntley's, nor been interested in any proceedings by which his brother's rights were to be established; but he had always reserved for himself or for Huntley the prerogative of finding and reinstating the true lady of the land, and Cosmo was human enough to regard "the present Melmar" with anything but amiable feelings. He could not bear the idea of being left out entirely in the management of the concern, or of one of the Huntleys exercising this champion's office, and covering the old usurpation with a veil of new generosity. It was a most uncomfortable view of the subject to Cosmo, and when his cogitations came to that point, the lad generally swung himself down from his window-seat and went off

somewhere in high excitement, scarcely able to repress the instant impulse to sling a bundle over his shoulder and set off upon his journey. But he never could rouse his courage to the point of re-opening this subject with his mother, little witting, foolish boy, that this admirable idea of his about Oswald Huntley was the very inducement necessary to make the Mistress as anxious about the recovery of Mary of Melmar as he himself was—and the only thing in the world which could have done so.

It happened on one of these summer evenings, about this time, when his own mind was exceedingly restless and unsettled, that Cosmo, passing through Kirkbride as the evening fell, encountered Bowed Jaacob just out of the village, on the Melrose road. The village street was full of little groups in earnest and eager discussion. It was still daylight, but the sun was down, and lights began to sparkle in some of the projecting

gable windows of the Norlaw Arms, beneath which, in the corner where the glow of the smithy generally warmed the air, a little knot of men stood together, fringed round with smaller clusters of women. A little bit of a moon, scarcely so big as the evening star which led her, was already high in the scarcely shadowed skies. Everything was still—save the roll of the widow's mangle and the restless feet of the children, so many of them as at this hour were out of bed—and most of the cottage doors stood open, revealing each its red gleam of fire, and many their jugs of milk, and bowls set ready on the table for the porridge or potatoes which made the evening meal. On the opposite brae of Tyne was visible the minister, walking home with an indescribable consciousness and disapproval, not in his face, for it was impossible to see that in the darkness, but in his figure and bearing, as he turned his back upon his excited parishioners, which was irresistibly

ludicrous when one knew what it meant. Beyond the village, at the opposite extremity, was Jaacob, in his evening trim, with a black coat and a hat, which considerably changed the little dwarf's appearance, without greatly improving it. He had his face to the south, and was pushing on steadily, clenching and opening, as he walked, the great brown fist which came so oddly out of the narrow cuff of his black coat. Cosmo, who was quite ready to give up his own vague fancies for the general excitement, came up to Jaacob quite eagerly, and fell into his pace without being aware of it.

“Are you going to Melrose for news? I'll go with you,” said Cosmo.

The road was by no means lonely; there were already both men and boys before them on the way.

“We should hear to-night, as you ken without me telling you,” said Jaacob. “I'm gaun to meet the coach; you may come if you



like—but what matter's is't to the like o' you?"

"To me! as much as to any man in Scotland," cried Cosmo, growing red; he thought the dignity of his years was impugned.

"Pish! you're a blackcoat, going to be," said Jaacob, "there's your friend the minister there, gaun up the brae. I sent *him* hame wi' a flea in his lug. What the deevil business has the like of him to meddle in our concerns? The country's coming to ruin, forsooth! because the franchise is coming to a man like me! Get away with you, callant! as soon as you come to man's estate you'll be like a' the rest! But ye may just as weel take an honest man's advice, Cosmo. If we dinna get it we'll tak it, and that'll be seen before the world afore mony days are past."

"What do you think the news will be?" asked Cosmo.

"Think! I'm past thinking," cried Jaacob, thrusting some imaginary person

away; “haud your tongue—can a man think when he’s wound up the length of taking sword in hand, if need should be? If we dinna get it, we’ll tak it—do ye hear?—that’s a’ I’m thinking in these days.”

And Jaacob swung along the road, working his long arms rather more than he did his feet, so that their action seemed part of his locomotive power. It was astonishing, too, to see how swiftly, how steadily, and with what a “way” upon him, the little giant strode onward, swinging the immense brown hands, knotted and sinewy, which it was hard to suppose could ever have been thrust through the narrow cuffs of his coat, like balancing weights on either side of him. Before them was the long line of dusty summer road disappearing down a slope, and cut off, not by the sky, but by the Eildons, which began to blacken in the fading light—behind them the lights of the village—above, in

a pale, warm sky, the one big dilating star and the morsel of moon; but the thoughts of Jaacob, and even of Cosmo, were on a lesser luminary—the red lantern of the coach, which was not yet to be seen by the keenest eyes advancing through the summer dimness from the south.

“Hang the lairds and the ministers!” cried Jaacob, after a pause, “it’s easy to see what a pair grip they have, and how well they ken it. Free institutions dinna agree with the like of primogeniture and thae inventions of the deevil. Let’s but hae a reformed parliament, and we’ll learn them better manners. There’s your grand Me’mar setting up for a leader amang the crew, presenting an address, confound his impudence! as if he wasna next hand to a swindler himself.”

“Jacob, do you know anything about his son?” asked Cosmo, eagerly.

“He’s a virtuoso—he’s a dilettawnti; I

ken nae ill of him," said Jaacob, who pronounced these titles with a little contempt, yet secretly had a respect for them; "he hasna been seen in this country, so far as I've heard tell of, for mony a day. A lad's no aye to blame for his father and his mother; its a thing folk in general have nae choice in—but he's useless to his ain race, either as friend or foe."

"Is he a good fellow then? or is he like Me'mar?" cried Cosmo.

"Tush! dinna afflict me about thae cratures in bad health," said Jaacob, "what's the use o' them, lads or lasses, is mair than I can tell—can they no dee and be done wi't? I tell you, a docken on the roadside is mair guid to a country than the like of Me'mar's son!"

"Is he in bad health?" asked the persistent Cosmo.

"They're a' in bad health," said Jaacob, contemptuously, "as any auld wife could tell

you ; a' but that red-haired lassie, that Joan. Speak o' your changelings ! how do ye account to me, you that's a philosopher, for the like of an honest spirit such as that, cast into the form of a lassie, and the midst of a hatching o' sparrows like Me'mar ? If she had but been a lad, she would have turned them a' out like a cuckoo in the nest."

"And Oswald Huntley is ill—an invalid ?" said Cosmo, softly returning to the thread of his own thoughts.

Jaacob once more thrust with contempt some imaginary opponent out of the way.

"Get away with you down Tyne or into the woods wi' your Oswald Huntleys !" cried Jaacob, indignantly—"do you think I'm heeding about ane of the name ? Whisht ! what's that ? Did you hear onything ?—haud your tongue for your life !"

Cosmo grew almost as excited as Jaacob—he seized upon the lowest bough of a big ash tree, and swung himself up, with the facility of

a country boy, among the fragrant dark foliage which rustled about him as he stood high among the branches as on a tower.

“D’ye see onything?” cried Jaacob, who could have cuffed the boy for the noise he made, even while he pushed him up from beneath.

“Hurra! here she comes—I can see the light!” shouted Cosmo.

The lad stood breathless among the rustling leaves, which hummed about him like a tremulous chorus. Far down at the foot of the slope, nothing else perceptible to mask its progress, came rushing on the fiery eye of light, red, fierce, and silent, like some mysterious giant of the night. It was impossible to hear either hoofs or wheels in the distance, still more to see the vehicle itself, for the evening by this time was considerably advanced, and the shadow of the three mystic hills lay heavy upon the road.

“She’s late,” said Jaacob, between his set

teeth. The little Cyclops held tight by the great waving bough of the ash, and set his foot in a hollow of its trunk, crushing beneath him the crackling underwood. Here the boy and he kept together breathless, Cosmo standing high above, and his companion thrusting his weird, unshaven face over the great branch on which he leaned. "She's up to Plover ha'—she's at the toll—she's stopped. What's that! listen!" cried Cosmo, as some faint, far off sound, which might have been the cry of a child, came on the soft evening air towards them.

Jaacob made an imperative gesture of silence with one hand, and grasped at the branch with the other till it shook under the pressure.

"She's coming on again—she's up to the Black ford—she's over the bridge—another halt—hark again!—that's not for passengers—they're hurraing—hark, Jaacob! hurra! she's coming—they've won the day!"

Jaacob, with the great branch swinging under his hands like a willow bough, bade the boy hold his peace, with a muttered oath through his set teeth. Now sounds became audible, the rattle of the hoofs upon the road, the ring of the wheels, the hum of exclamations and excited voices, under the influence of which the horses "took the brae" gallantly, with a half-human intoxication. As they drew gradually nearer, and the noise increased, and the faint moonlight fell upon the flags and ribbons and dusty branches, with which the coach was ornamented, Cosmo, unable to contain himself, came rolling down on his hands and feet over the top of Jaacob, and descended with a bold leap in the middle of the road. Jaacob, muttering fiercely, stumbled after him, just in time to drag the excited boy out of the way of the coach, which was making up for lost time by furious speed, and of which coachman, guard, and outside passengers, too much excited to be perfectly sober, kept up their



unanimous murmurs of jubilee, with only a very secondary regard to the road or any obstructions which might be upon it.

“Wha’s there? get out o’ my road, every soul o’ ye! I’ll drive the gait blindfold, night or day, but I’ll no’ undertake the consequence if ye rin among my wheels,” cried the driver.

“Hurra! lads! the Bill’s past—we’ve won! Hurra!” shouted another voice from the roof of the vehicle, accompanying the shout with a slightly unsteady wave of a flag, while, with a little swell of sympathetic cheers, and a triumphant flourish of trumpet from the guard, the jubilant vehicle dashed on, rejoicing as never mailcoach rejoiced before.

Jaacob took off his hat, tossed it into the air, crushed it between his hands as it came down, and broke into an extraordinary shout, bellow, or groan, which it was impossible to interpret; then, turning sharp round, pur-

sued the coach with a fierce speed, like the run of a little tiger, setting all his energies to it, swinging his long arms on either side of him, and raising about as much dust as the mail which he followed. Cosmo, left behind, followed more gently, laughing in spite of himself, and in spite of the heroics of the day, which included every national benefit and necessity within the compass of "the Bill," at the grotesque little figure disappearing before him, twisting its great feet, and swinging its arms in that extraordinary race. When the boy reached Kirkbride, the coach was just leaving the village amid a chorus of cheers and shouts of triumph. No one could think of anything else or speak of anything else; everybody was shaking hands with everybody, and in the hum of amateur speechifying, half-a-dozen together, Cosmo had hard work to recall even that sober personage, the postmaster, who felt himself to some extent a representative of government and natural

moderator of the general excitement, to some sense of his duties. Cosmo's exertions, however, were rewarded by the sight of three letters, with which he hastened home.

## CHAPTER X.

“THE Reform Bill’s passed, mother! we’ve won the day!” cried Cosmo, rushing into the Norlaw dining-parlour with an additional hurra! of exultation. After all the din and excitement out of doors, the summer twilight of the room, with one candle lighted and one unlit upon the table, and the widow seated by herself at work, the only one living object in the apartment, looked somewhat dreary—but she looked up with a brightening face, and lighted the second candle immediately on her son’s return.

“Eh, laddie, that’s news!” cried the

Mistress; “are you sure it’s true? I didna think, for my part, the Lords had as much sense. Passed! come to be law!—eh, my Huntley! to think he’s at the other end of the world and canna hear.”

“He’ll hear in time,” said Cosmo, with a little agitation, producing his budget of letters. “Mother, I’ve more news than about the Bill. I’ve a letter here.”

His mother rose and advanced upon him with characteristic vehemence :—

“Do you dare to play with your mother, you silly bairn? Give it to me,” said the Mistress, whom Cosmo’s hurried, breathless, joyful face had already enlightened; “do you think I canna bear gladness, me that never fainted with sorrow? Eh Huntley, my bairn!”

And in spite of her indignation, Huntley’s mother sank into the nearest chair, and let her tears fall on his letter as she opened it. It did not, however, prove to be the intima-

tion of his arrival, which they hoped for. It was written at sea, three months after his departure, when he was still not above half way on his journey; for it was a more serious business getting to Australia in those days than it is now. Huntley wrote out of his little berth in the middle of the big ocean, with all the strange creaks of the ship and voices of his fellow passengers to bear him company, with a heart which was still at Norlaw. The Mistress tried very hard to read his letter aloud; she drew first one and then the other candle close to her, exclaiming against the dimness of the light; she stopped in the middle of a sentence, with something very like a sob, to bid Cosmo sharply be quiet and no' interrupt her, like a restless bairn, while she read his brother's letter; but at last the Mistress broke down and tried no further. It was about ten months since she bade him farewell, and this was the first token of Huntley's real person and existence which for all

that lingering and weary time had come to his mother, who had never missed him out of her sight for a week at a time, all his life before.

There was not a very great deal in it even now, for letter-writing had been a science little practised at Norlaw, and Huntley had still nothing to tell but the spare details of a long sea voyage ; there was, however, in it, what there is not in all letters, nor in many—even much more affectionate and effusive epistles than this,—Huntley himself. When the Mistress had come to the end, which was but slowly, in consideration of the dimness of the candles or her eyes, she gave it to Cosmo, and waited rather impatiently for his perusal of the precious letter. Then she went over it again, making hasty excuse as she did so, for “one part I didna make out,” and finally, unable to refrain, got up and went to the kitchen, where Marget was still busy, to communicate the good news.

The kitchen door was open ; there was neither blind nor shutter upon the kitchen-window, and the soft summer stars, now peeping out in half visible hosts like cherubs, might look in upon Marget, passing back and forward through the firelight, as much and as often as they pleased. From the open door a soft evening breath of wind, with the fragrance of new growth and vegetation upon it, which is almost as sweet as positive odours, came pleasantly into the ruddy apartment, where the light found a hundred bright points to sparkle in, from the “brass pan” and copper-kettle on the shelf to the thick yolks of glass in one or two of the window-panes. It was not quite easy to tell what Marget was doing ; she was generally busy, moving about with a little hum of song, setting everything in order for the night.

“ Marget, my woman, you’ll be pleased to hear—I’ve heard from my son,” said the Mistress, with unusual graciousness. She came



and stood in front of the fire, waiting to be questioned, and the firelight still shone with a very prismatic radiance through the Mistress's eye-lashes, careful though she had been, before she entered, to remove the dew from her eyes.

“You're no' meaning Mr. Huntley. Eh! bless him! has he won there?” cried Marget, letting down her kilted gown, and hastening forward.

And then the Mistress was tempted to draw forth her letter, and read “a bit here and a bit there,” which the faithful servant received with sobs and exclamations.

“Bless the laddie! he minds every single thing at Norlaw—even the like of me!” cried Marget; upon which the Mistress rose again from the seat she had taken with a little start of impatience:—

“Wherefore should he no' mind you?—you've been about the house a' his life;

and I hope I'll never live to see the day when a bairn of mine forgets his hame and auld friends! It's time to bar the door, and put up the shutter. You should have had a' done, and your fire gathered by this time; but it's a bonnie night!"

"'Deed, ay!" said Marget to herself, when Huntley's mother had once more joined Cosmo in the dining-room; "the bonniest night that's been to her this mony a month, though she'll no' let on—as if I didna ken how her heart yearns to that laddie on the sea, blessings on him! Eh, sirs! to think o' thae very stars shining on the auld castle and the young laird, though the world itsel's between the twa—and the guid hand of Providence ower a'—God be thanked!—to bring the bairn hame!"

When the Mistress returned to the dining-parlour, she found Cosmo quite absorbed with another letter. The lad's face was

flushed with half-abashed pleasure, and a smile, shy, but triumphant, was on his lip. It was not Patie's periodical letter, which still lay unopened before her own chair, where it had been left in the overpowering interest of Huntley's. The Mistress was not perfectly pleased. To care for what anybody else might write—"one of his student lads, nae doubt, or some other fremd person," in presence of the first letter from Huntley, was almost a slight to her first-born.

"You're strange creatures, you laddies," said the Mistress. "I dinna understand you, for my part. There are you, Cosmo Livingstone, as pleased about your nonsense letter, whatever it may be, as if there was no such person as my Huntley in the world—him that aye made such a wark about you!"

"This is not a nonsense letter—will you read it, mother?" said Cosmo.

“Me!—I havena lookit at Patie’s letter yet!” cried the Mistress, indignantly. “Do you think I’m a person to be diverted with what one callant writes to another? Hold your peace, bairn, and let me see what my son says.”

The Mistress accordingly betook herself to Patrick’s letter with great seriousness and diligence, keeping her eyes steadily upon it, and away from Cosmo, whom, nevertheless, she could still perceive holding *his* letter, his own especial correspondence, with the same look of shy pleasure, in his hand. Patie’s epistle had nothing of remarkable interest in it, as it happened, and the Mistress could not quite resist a momentary and troubled speculation. Who was Cosmo’s correspondent, who pleased him so much, yet made him blush? Could it be a woman? The idea made her quite angry in spite of herself — at his age!

“Now, mother, read this,” said Cosmo, with the same smile.

“If it’s any kind of bairn’s nonsense, dinna offer it to me,” said the Mistress, impatiently. “Am I prying into wha writes you letters? I tell you I’ve had letters enough for ae night. Peter Todhunter!—wha in the world is he?”

“Read it, mother,” repeated Cosmo.

The Mistress read in much amazement; and the epistle was as follows:—

*“North British Courant Office,  
Edinburgh.”*

“DEAR SIR,

“Hearing that you are the C. L. N. who have favoured the *North British Courant* from time to time with poetical effusions which seem to shew a good deal of talent, I write to ask whether you have ever done anything in the way of prose romance, or essays of a humorous character in the style of Sterne, or

narrative poetry. I am just about to start (with a good staff of well-known contributors) a new monthly, to be called the *Auld Reekie Magazine*, a miscellany of general literature; and should be glad to receive and give my best consideration to any articles from your pen. The rates of remuneration I can scarcely speak decisively about until the success of the new undertaking is in some degree established; but this I may say—that they shall be *liberal* and *satisfactory*, and I trust may be the means of inaugurating a new and better system of mutual support between publishers and authors—the accomplishment of which has long been a great object of my life.

“Your obedient servant,

“PETER TODHUNTER.”

“The *North British Courant*! poetry! writing for a magazine!—what does it a’ mean,” cried the Mistress. “Do you mean

to tell me you're an author, Cosmo Livingstone?—and me never kent—a bairn like you!”

“Nothing but some—verses, mother,” said the boy, with a blush and a laugh, though he was not insensible to the importance of Mr. Todhunter's communication. Cosmo's vanity was not sufficiently rampant to say poems. “I did not send them with my name. I wanted to do something better before I shewed them to you.”

“And here they're wanting the callant for a magazine!” cried the Mistress. “Naething but a bairn—the youngest! a laddie that never was out of Norlaw till within six months time! And I warrant they ken what's for their ain profit, and what kind of a lad they're seeking after—and me this very night thinking him nae better than a bairn!”

And the Mistress laughed in the mood

of exquisite pride at its highest point of gratification, and followed up her laugh by tears of the same. The boy was pleased, but his mother was intoxicated. The *North British Courant* and the *Auld Reekie Magazine* were glorious in her eyes as celestial messengers of fame, and she could not but follow the movements of her boy with the amazed observation of a sudden discovery. He who was “naething but a bairn” had already proved himself a genius, and Literature urgent called him to her aid. He might be a Scott—he might turn out a Shakspeare. The Mistress looked at him with no limit to her wonder, and for the moment none in her faith.

“And just as good a laddie as he aye was,” she murmured to herself, stroking his hair fondly—“though mony a ane’s head would have been clean turned to see themsels in a printed paper—no’ to say in a book. Eh, bairn! and to think how little I kent, that



am your mother, what God had put among my very bairns !”

“Mother, it may turn out poor enough after all,” cried Cosmo, half ashamed—“I don’t know yet myself what I can do.”

“I daresay no,” said the Mistress, proudly, “but you may take my word this decent man does, Cosmo, seeing his ain interest is concerned. Na, laddie, *I* ken, if you dinna, the ways of this world, and I wouldna say but they think they’ve got just a prize in my bairn. Eh ! if the laddies were but here and kent !—and oh, Cosmo ! what *he* would have thought of it that’s gone !”

When the Mistress had dried her eyes, she managed to draw from the boy a gradual confession that the *North British Courant*, sundry numbers of it, were snugly hid in his own trunk upstairs, from which concealment they were brought forth with much shamefacedness by Cosmo, and read with the greatest triumph by his mother. The

Mistress had no mind to go to rest that night—she stayed up looking at him—wondering over him ; and Cosmo confessed to some of his hitherto secret fancies—how he would like to go abroad to see new countries, and to hear strange tongues, and how he had longed to labour for himself.

“ Whisht ! laddie—I would have been angry but for this,” said the Mistress. “ The like of you has nae call to work ; but I canna say onything mair, Cosmo, now that Providence has taken it out o’ my hand. And I dinna wonder you would like to travel—the like of you canna be fed on common bread like common folk—and you’ll hae to see everything if you’re to be an author. Na, laddie, no’ for the comfort of seeing you and hearing you would I put bars on your road. I aye thought I would live to be proud of my sons, but I didna ken I was to be overwhelmed in a moment, and you naething but a bairn ! ”

## CHAPTER XI.

THE result of this conversation was that Cosmo made a little private visit to Edinburgh to determine his own entrance into the Republic of letters, and to see the enterprising projector of the *Auld Reekie Magazine* through whom this was to take place. The boy went modestly, half abashed by his good fortune and dawning dream of fame, yet full of a flush of youthful hope, sadly out of proportion to any possible pretensions of the new periodical. He saw it advertised in the newspaper which one of his fellow-passengers on the coach read on the way. He saw a little

printed handbill with its illustrious name in the window of the first bookseller's shop he looked into, on his arrival in Edinburgh, and Cosmo marched over the North Bridge with his carpet-bag in his hand, with a swell of visionary glory. He could not help half wondering what the indifferent people round him would think, if they knew—and then could not but blush at himself for the fancy. Altogether the lad was in a tumult of delightful excitement, hope, and pleasure, such as perhaps only falls to the lot of boys who hope themselves poets, and think at eighteen that they are already appreciated and on the highway to fame.

As he ascended the stairs to Mrs. Purdie's, he met Cameron coming down. There was a very warm greeting between them—a greeting which surprise startled into unusual affectionateness on the part of the Highlander. Cameron forgot his own business altogether to return with Cosmo, and needed very little

persuasion to enter the little parlour which no other lodger had turned up to occupy, and share the refreshment which the overjoyed landlady made haste to prepare for her young guest. This was so very unusual a yielding on Cameron's part, that Cosmo almost forgot his own pre-occupation in observing his friend, who altogether looked brightened and smoothed out, and younger than when they parted. The elder and soberer man, who knew a little more of life and the world than Cosmo, though very little more of literature, could not help a half-perceptible smile at the exuberance of Cosmo's hopes. Not that Cameron despised the *Auld Reekie Magazine*;—far from that, the divinity student had all the reverence for literature common to those who know little about it, which reverence, alas! grows smaller and smaller in this too-knowing age. But at thirty years old people knew better than at eighteen how the sublimest undertakings break down, and how sometimes even “the

highest talent" cannot float its venture. So the man found it hard not to smile at the boy's shy triumph and undoubting hope, yet could not help but be proud, notwithstanding, with a tenderness almost feminine, of the unknown gifts of the lad, whose youth, he could not quite tell how, had found out the womanish corner of his own reserved heart, in which, as he said himself, only two or three could find room at any time.

"But you never told me of these poetical effusions, Cosmo," said his friend, as he put up the bookseller's note.

"Don't laugh at Mr. Todhunter. *I* only call them verses," said Cosmo, with that indescribable blending of vanity and humility which belongs to his age; "and I knew you would not care for them; they were not worth shewing to you."

"I'm not a poetical man," said Cameron, "but I might care for *your* verses in spite of that—and now Cosmo, laddie, while you have

been thinking of fame, what novel visitor should you suppose had come to me?"

"Who?—what?" cried Cosmo, with eager interest.

"What?" echoed Cameron, "either temptation or good fortune—it's hard to say which—only I incline to the first. Satan's an active chield, and thinks little of trouble—but I doubt if the other one would have taken the pains to climb my stair. I've had an offer of a tutorship, Cosmo—to go abroad for six months or so with a callant like yourself."

"To go abroad!" Cosmo's eyes lighted up with instant excitement, and he stretched his hand across the table to his friend, with a vehemence which Cameron did not understand, though he returned the grasp.

"An odd enough thing for me," said the Highlandman, "but the man's an eccentric man, and something has possessed him that his son would be in safe hands; as in safe hands he might be," added the student in an

undertone, "seeing I would be sorry to lead any lad into evil—but as for *fit* hands, that's to be seen, and I'm far from confident it would be right for me."

"Go, and I'll go with you," said Cosmo, eagerly. "I've set my heart upon it for years."

"More temptation!" said the Highlandman. "Carnal inclinations and pleasures of this world—and I've little time to lose. I cannot afford a session—whisht! Comfort and ease to the flesh, and pleasure to the mind, are hard enough to fight with by themselves, without help from you."

It was almost the first time he had made the slightest allusion to his own hard life and prolonged struggle, and Cosmo was silent out of respect and partially in the belief that if Cameron's mind had not been very near made up in favour of this new proposal, he would not have suffered himself to refer to it. The two friends sat up late together that night.



Cosmo pouring out all his maze of half-formed plans and indistinct intentions into Cameron's ears—his projects of authorship, his plan for a tragedy of which Wallace might should be the hero—of a pastoral poem and narrative, something between Colin Clout and the Gentle Shepherd—and of essays and philosophies without end; while Cameron on his part smiled, as he could not but smile by right of his thirty years, yet somehow began to believe, like the Mistress, in the enthusiastic boy, with all that youthful flush and fervor in the face which his triumph and inspiration of hope made beautiful. The elder man could not give his own confidence so freely as Cosmo did, but he opened himself as far as it was his nature to do, in droppings of shy frankness—a little now and a little then—which were in reality the very highest compliment which such a man could pay to his companion. When they separated, Cameron, it is true, knew all about Cosmo,

while Cosmo did not know all about Cameron. But the difference was not even so much a matter of temperament as of years, and the lad, without hearing many particulars, or having a great deal of actual confidence given to him, knew the man better at the end of this long evening than ever he had done before.

In the morning Cosmo got up full of pleasurable excitement, and set out early to call on Mr. Todhunter. The *North British Courant* Office was in one of the short streets which run between Princes Street and George Street, and in the back premises, a long way back, through a succession of rooms, Cosmo was ushered into the especial little den of the publisher. Mr. Todhunter was of a yellow complexion, with loose thick lips and wiry black hair. The lips were the most noticeable feature in his face, from the circumstance that when he spoke his mouth seemed uncomfortably full of moisture, which

gave also a peculiar character to his voice. He was surrounded by a mass of papers, and had paste and scissors—those palladiums of the weekly press—by his side. If there was one thing more than another on which the *North British Courant* prided itself, it was on the admirable collection of other people's opinions which everybody might find in its columns. Mr. Todhunter made no very great stand upon politics. What he prized was a reputation which he thought “literary,” and a skill almost amounting to genius for making what he called “excerpts.”

“Very glad to make your personal acquaintance, Mr. Livingstone,” said the projector of the *Auld Reekie Magazine*, “and still more to receive your assurances of support. I’ve set my heart on making this a real, impartial, literary enterprise, sir—no’ one of your close boroughs, as they say now-a-days, for a dozen or a score of favoured contributors, but open to ge-

nious, sir — genius wherever it may be — rich or poor.”

Cosmo did not know precisely what to answer, so he filled in the pause with a little murmur of assent.

“Ye see the relations of everything’s changing,” said Mr. Todhunter; “old arrangements will not do — wull not answer, sir, in an advancing age. I have always held high opinions as to the claims of literary men, myself — it’s against my nature to treat a man of genius like a shop-keeper — and my principle, in the *Auld Reekie Magazine*, is just this — first-rate talent to make the thing pay, and first-rate pay to secure the talent. That’s my rule; and I think it’s a very safe guide for a plain man like me.”

“And it’s sure to succeed,” said Cosmo, with enthusiasm.

“I think it wull, sir — upon my conscience, if you ask me, I think it wull,”

said Mr. Todhunter; “and I have little doubt young talent will rally round the *Auld Reekie Magazine*. I’m aware it’s an experiment, but nothing shall ever make me give in to an ungenerous principle. Men of genius must be protected, sir; and how are they protected in your old-established periodicals? There’s one old fogey for this department, and another old fogey for that department; and as for a genial recognition of young talent, take my word for’t, there’s no such thing.”

“I know,” said Cosmo, “it is the hardest thing in the world to get in. Poor Chatterton, and Keats, and—”

“Just that,” said Mr. Todhunter. “It’s for the Keats and the Chattertons of this day, sir, that I mean to interpose; and no lad of genius shall go to the grave with a pistol in his hand henceforward if I can help it. I admire your effusions very much, Mr. Livingstone—there’s real heart

and talent in them, sir — in especial the one to Mary, which, I must say, gave me the impression of an older man.”

“I am pretty old in practice—I have been writing a great many years,” said Cosmo, with that delightful, ingenuous, single-minded, youthful vanity, which it did one’s heart good to see. Even Mr. Todhunter, over his paste and scissors, was somehow illumined by it, and looked up at the lad with the ghost of a smile upon his watery lips.

“And what do you mean to provide us for the opening of the feast?” said the bookseller, “which must be ready by the 15th, at the very latest, and be the very cream of your inspiration. It’s no small occasion, sir. Have you made up your mind what is to be your *deboo*?”

“It depends greatly upon what you think best,” said Cosmo, candid and impartial; “and as you know what articles

you have secured already, I should be very glad of any hint from you."

"A very sensible remark," said Mr. Todhunter. "Well, I would say, a good narrative now, in fine, stirring, ballad verse—a narrative always pleases the public fancy—or a spirited dramatic sketch, or a historical tale, to be completed, say, in the next number. I should say, sir, any one of these would answer the *Auld Reekie*;—only be on your metal. I consider there's good stuff in you—real good stuff—but, at the same time, many prudent persons would tell me I was putting too much reliance on so young a man."

"I will not disappoint you," said Cosmo, with a little pride; "but, supposing this first beginning over, could it do any good to the magazine, do you think, to have a contributor—letters from abroad—I had some thoughts—I—I wished very much to know—"

“Were you thinking of going abroad?” said the bookseller, benignantly.

“I can scarcely say *think* — but, there was an opportunity,” said Cosmo, with a blush; “that is, if it did not stand in the way of—”

“The *Auld Reekie*? Certainly not—on the contrary, I know nothing I would like better,” said Mr. Todhunter. “Some fine Italian legends, now, or a few stories from the Rhine, with a pleasant introduction, and a little romantic incident, to shew how you heard them—capital! but I must see you at my house before you go. And as for the remuneration, we can scarcely fix on that, perhaps, till the periodical’s launched—but ye know my principle, and I may say, sir, with confidence, no man was left in the lurch that put reliance upon me. I’m a plain man, as you see me, but I appreciate the claims of genius, and young talent shall not want its platform in this city of Edinburgh; or, if it does, it shall be no fault of mine.”



With a murmured applause of this sentiment, and in a renewed tumult of pleasure, Cosmo left his new friend, and went home lingering over the delightful thought of Italian legends and stories of the Rhine, told in the very scenes of the same. The idea intoxicated him almost out of remembrance of Mary of Melmar, and if the boy's head was not turned, it seemed in a very fair way of being so, for the sentiments of Mr. Todhunter—a publisher!—a practical man!—one who knew the real value of authorship! filled the lad with a vague glory in his new craft. A London newspaper proprietor, who spoke like the possessor of the *North British Courant*, would have been, the chances are, a conscious humbug, and perhaps so might an Edinburgh bookseller of the present time, who expressed the same sentiments. Mr. Todhunter, however, was not a humbug. He was like one of those dabblers in science who come at some simple mechanical principle by

chance, and in all the flush of their discovery, claim as original and their own what was well known a hundred years since. He was perfectly honest in the rude yet simple vanity with which he patronized “young talent,” and in his vulgar, homely fashion, felt that he had quite seized upon a new idea in his *Auld Reekie Magazine*—an idea too original and notable to yield precedence even to the *Edinburgh Review*.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE pace of events began to quicken with Cosmo. When he encountered his fellow-lodger in the evening, he found that Cameron had been permitting his temptation to gain more and more ground upon him. The Highlander, humbly born and cottage bred as he was, and till very recently bounded by the straitest prospects as to the future, had still a deep reserve of imaginative feeling, far away down where no one could get at it—under the deposit left by the slow toil and vulgar privations of many years. Unconsciously to himself, the presence and society

of Cosmo Livingstone had recalled his own boyhood to the labouring man, in the midst of that sweat of his brow in which he ate his scanty bread in the Edinburgh garret. Where was there ever boyhood which had not visions of adventure and dreams of strange countries? All that last winter, through which his boy companion stole into his heart, recollections used to come suddenly upon the uncommunicating Highlander of hours and fancies in his own life, which he supposed he had long ago forgotten—hours among his own hills, herding sheep, when he lay looking up at the skies, and entranced by the heroic lore with which he was most familiar, thinking of David's well at Bethlehem, and the wine-press where Gideon thrashed his wheat, and the desert waters where Moses led his people, and of all the glorious unknown world beside, through which his path must lie to the Holy Land. Want, and labour, and the steady, desperate aim, with which he pushed through

every obstacle towards the one goal of his ambition, had obscured these visions in his mind, but Cosmo's fresh boyhood woke them by degrees, and the unusual and unexpected proposal lately made to him, had thrilled the cooled blood in Cameron's veins as he did not suppose it could be thrilled. Ease, luxury (to him), and gratification in the meantime, with a reserve fund great enough to carry him through a session without any extra labour. Why did he hesitate? He hesitated simply because it might put off for six months — possibly for a year — the accomplishment of his own studies and the gaining of that end, which was not a certain living, however humble, but merely the licence to preach, and his chance with a hundred others of a presentation to some poor rural parish, or a call from some chapel of ease. But he did hesitate long and painfully. He feared, in his austere self-judgment, to prefer his own pleasure to the work of God, and it was only

when his boy-favourite came back again and threw all his fervid youthful influence into the scale, that Nature triumphed with Cameron, and that he began to permit himself to remember that, toilworn as he was, he was still young, and that the six months' holiday might, after all, be well expended. The very morning after Cosmo's arrival, after lying awake thinking of it half the night, he had gone to the father of his would-be-pupil to explain the condition on which he would accept the charge, which was, that Cosmo might be permitted to join the little party. Cameron's patron was a Highlander, like himself—obstinate, one-sided, and imperious. He did not refuse the application. He only issued instant orders that Cosmo should be presented to him without delay, that he might judge of his fitness as a travelling companion—and Cameron left him, pledged, if his decision should be favourable, to accept the office.

The next day was a great day in Edinburgh—an almost universal holiday, full of flags, processions, and all manner of political rejoicings, the Reform Jubilee. Cosmo plunged into the midst of it with all the zeal of a young politician and all the zest of a schoolboy, and was whirled about by the crowd through all its moods and phases, through the heat, and the dust, and the sunshine, through the shouts and groans, the applauses and the denunciations, to his heart's content. He came in breathless somewhere about midday, as he supposed, though in reality it was late in the afternoon, to snatch a hurried morsel of the dinner which Mrs. Purdie had vainly endeavored to keep warm for him, and to leave a message for Cameron to be ready for him in the evening, to go out and see the illumination. When Cosmo reappeared again, flushed, tired, excited, yet perfectly ready to begin once more, it was already darkening towards night. Cameron

was ready, and the boy was not to be persuaded to lose the night and "the fun," which already began to look rather like mischief. The two companions, so unlike each other, made haste to the Calton Hill, where a great many people had already preceded them. Oh, dwellers on the plains! oh, cockney citizens!—spite of your gas stars and your transparencies—your royal initials and festoons of lamps, don't suppose that you know anything about an illumination; you should have seen the lines of light stealing from slope to slope along the rugged glory of that antique Edinburgh—the irregular gleams descending into the valley, the golden threads, here and there broken, that intersected the regular lines of the new town. Yonder tall houses, seven stories high, where every man is a Reformer, and where the lights come out in every window, star by star, in a flicker and glow, as if the very weakness of those humble candles gave them the



animation and humanness of a breathing triumph—swelling higher towards the dark castle, over whose unlighted head the little moon looks down, a serene spectator of all this human flutter and commotion—undulating down in rugged breaks towards lowly Holyrood, sometimes only a thin line visible beneath the roof—sometimes a whole house aglow. The people went and came, in excited groups, upon the fragrant grass of the Calton Hill; sometimes turning to the other side of the landscape, to see the more sparsely lighted streets of gentility, or the independent little sparkle which stout little Leith in the distance threw out upon the Firth—but always returning with unfailing fascination to this scene of magic—the old town shining with its lamps and jewels, like a city in a dream.

But it was not destined to be a perfectly calm summer evening's spectacle. The hum of the full streets grew riotous even to the spectators on the hill. Voices rose above the

hum, louder than peaceful voices ever rise. The triumph was a popular triumph, and like every other such, had its attendant mob of mischief. Shouts of rising clamour and a noise of rushing footsteps ran through the busy streets—then came a sharp rattle and peal like a discharge of musketry. What was it? The crowd on the hill poured down the descent, in fright, in excitement, in precaution—some into the mischief, some eager to escape out of it. “It’s the sodgers,”—it’s the police,” “it’s the Tories,” shouted the chorus of the crowd—one suggestion after another raising the fury of some and the terror of others; again a rattling, dropping, continued report—one after another, with rushes of the crowd between, and perpetual changes of locality in the sound, which at last indicated its nature beyond mistake. It was no interference of authority—no firing of “the sodgers.” It was a sound less tragic, yet full of mischief—the crash of unilluminated

windows, the bloodless yet violent revenge of the excited mob.

The sound—the swell—the clamor—the tramp of feet—the shouts—the reiterated volleys, now here, now there, in constant change and progress, the silent flicker and glow of the now neglected lights, the hasty new ones thrust into exposed windows, telling their story of sudden alarm and reluctance, and above all the pale, serene sky, against which the bold outline of Arthur's Seat stood out as clear as in the daylight, and the calm, unimpassioned shining of the little moon, catching the windows of the castle and church beneath with a glimmer of silver, made altogether a scene of the most singular excitement and impressiveness. But Cosmo Livingstone had forgotten that he was a poet,—he was only a boy—a desperate, red-hot Radical—a friend of the people. Despite all Cameron's efforts, the boy dragged him into the crowd, and hurried him along to the scene

of action. The rioters by this time were spreading everywhere, out of the greater streets into the calm of the highest respectability, where not one window in a dozen was lighted, and where many had closed their shutters in defiance—far to the west in the moonlight, where the illuminations of the old town were invisible, and where wealth and conservatism dwelt together. Breathless, yet dragging his grave companion after him, Cosmo rushed along one of the dimmest and stateliest of these streets. The lad leaped back again into the heart of a momentary fancy, which was already old and forgotten, though it had been extremely interesting a month ago. He cried “Desirée!” to himself, as he rushed in the wake of the rioters through Moray Place. He did not know which was the house, yet followed vaguely with an instinct of defence and protection. In one of the houses some women appeared, timidly putting forward candles in the highest

line of windows ; perhaps out of exasperation at this cowardice, perhaps from mere accident, some one among the crowd discharged a volley of stones against one of the lower range. There was a moment's pause, and it remained doubtful whether this lead was to be followed, when suddenly the door of the house was thrown open, and a girl appeared upon the threshold, distinctly visible against the strong light from the hall. Though Cosmo sprang forward with a bound, he could not hear what she said, but she rushed down on the broad step, and made a vehement address to the rioters, with lively motions of her hands, and a voice that pierced through their rude voices like a note of music. This lasted only a moment ; in another the door had closed behind her with a loud echo, and all was dark again. Where was she ? Cosmo pushed through the crowd in violent excitement, thrusting them away on every side with double strength. Yes, there she stood

upon the step, indignant, vehement, with her little white hands clasped together, and her eyes flashing, from the rioters before her to the closed door behind.

“You English!—you are cowards!” cried the violent little heroine, “you do not fight like men, with balls and swords—you throw pebbles, like children—you wound women—and when one dares to go to speak to the madmen, she is shut out into the crowd!”

“We’re no English, missie, and naebody meant to hurt you; chap at the door for her, yin o’ you lads—and let the poor thing alone—she’s a very good spirit of her ain. I’m saying, open the door,” cried one of the rioters, changing his soothing tone to a loud demand, as he shook the closed door violently. By this time Cosmo was by the little French-woman’s side.

“I know her,” cried Cosmo, “they’ll open when you’re past—pass on—it’s a school—a houseful of women—do you mean to say

you would break a lady's windows that has nothing to do with it?—pass on!—is that sense, or honor, or courage? is that a credit to the Bill, or to the country? I'll take care of the young lady. Do you not see they think you robbers, or worse? They'll not open till you pass on."

"He's in the right of it there—what are ye a' waiting for?" cried some one in advance. The throng moved on, leaving a single group about the door, but this little incident was enough to damp them. Moray Place escaped with much less sacrifice of glass and temper than might have been looked for—while poor little Desirée, subsiding out of her passion, leaned against the pillar of the inhospitable door, crying bitterly, and sobbing little exclamations of despair in her own tongue, which sounded sweet to Cosmo's ear, though he did not know what they were.

"Mademoiselle Desirée, don't be afraid," cried the boy, blushing in the dark. "I saw

you once with Joanna Huntley—I'm a friend. Nobody will meddle with you. When they see these fellows gone, they'll open the door."

"And I despise them!" cried Desirée, suddenly suspending her crying, "they will shut me out in the crowd for fear of themselves. I despise them! and see here!"

A stone had struck her on the temple; it was no great wound, but Desirée was shocked and excited, and in a heroic mood.

"And they will leave me here," cried the little Frenchwoman, pathetically, with renewed tears; "though it is my mother's country, and I meant to love it, they shut me out among strangers, and no one cares. Ah, they would not do so in France! there they do not throw stones at women—they kill men!"

Cosmo was horrified by the blow, and deeply impressed by the heroics. The boy blushed with the utmost shame for his townsmen and co-politicians. He thought the



girl a little Joan of Arc affronted by a mob.

“But it was accident; every man would be overpowered with shame,” cried Cosmo, while meanwhile Cameron, who had followed him, knocked soberly, and without speaking, at the door.

After a little interval, the door was opened by the mistress of the school, a lady of grave age and still graver looks; a couple of women-servants in the hall were defending themselves eagerly.

“I was up-stairs, and never heard a word of it, mum,” said one. “Eh, it wasna me!” cried another; “the French Miss flew out upon the steps, and the door just clashed behind her; it was naeboddy’s blame but her ain.”

In the midst of these self-exculpatory addresses, the mistress of the house held the door open.

“Come in, Mademoiselle Desirée,” she said gravely.

The excited little Frenchwoman was not disposed to yield so quietly.

“Madam, I have been wounded, I have been shut out, I have been left alone in the crowd!” cried Desirée; “I demand of you to do me justice—see, I bleed! One of the *vauriens* struck me through the window with a stone, and the door has been closed upon me. I have stood before all the crowd alone!”

“I am sorry for it, my dear,” said the lady, coldly; “come in—you ought never to have gone to the door, or exposed yourself; young ladies do not do so in this country. Pray come in, Mademoiselle Desirée. I am sorry you are hurt—and, gentlemen, we are much obliged to you—good night.”

For the girl, half-reluctantly, half-indignantly, had obeyed her superior, and the door was calmly closed in the faces of Cosmo and Cameron, who stood together on the steps. Cosmo was highly incensed and wrathful. He could have had the heart to plunge into that cold,

proper, lighted hall, to snatch the little heroine forth, and carry her off, like a knight of romance.

“Do you hear how that woman speaks to her?” he cried, indignantly.

Cameron grasped his arm and drew him away.

“She’s French!” said the elder man, laconically, and without any enthusiasm; “and not to anger you, Cosmo, the lady is perfectly right.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

Cosmo went home that evening much excited by his night's adventures. Mrs. Payne, of Moray Place, was an ogre in the boy's eyes, the Giantess Despair, holding bewitched princesses in vile durance and subjection—and Désirée, with the red mark upon her pretty forehead, with her little white hands clasped together, and her black eyes sparkling, was nothing less than a heroine. Cosmo could not forget the pretty attitude, the face glowing with resentment and girlish boldness; nor the cold gravity of the voice which bade her enter, and the unsympathetic disapproval in the lady's

face. He could not rest for thinking of it when he got home. In his new feeling of importance and influence as a person privileged to address the public, his first idea was to call upon Mrs. Payne in the morning, by way of protector to Desirée, to explain how the whole matter occurred ; but on further thoughts Cosmo resolved to write a very grave and serious letter on the subject, vindicating the girl, and pointing out in a benevolent way, the danger of repressing her high spirit harshly. As soon as he was alone, he set about carrying out this idea in an epistle worthy the pages of the *Auld Reekie Magazine*, and written with a solemn authority which would have become an adviser of eighty instead of eighteen. He wrote it out in his best hand, put it up carefully, and resolved to leave it himself in the morning, lest the post (letters were dear in those days) might miscarry with so important a document. But Cosmo, who was much worn out, slept late in the morning, so late

that Cameron came into his room, and saw the letter before he was up. It excited the curiosity of the Highlander, and Cosmo, somewhat shyly, admitted him to the privilege of reading it. It proved too much, however, for the gravity of his friend; and, vexed and ashamed at last, though by no means convinced, the lad tore it in bits, and threw it into the fireplace. Cameron kept him occupied all day, breaking out, nevertheless, into secret chuckles of amusement now and then, which it was very difficult to find a due occasion for; and Cosmo was not even left to himself long enough to pass the door of the house in Moray Place, or to ask after the "wound" of his little heroine. He did the only thing which remained possible to him; he made the incident into a copy of verses, which he sent to the *North British Courant*, and which duly appeared in that enlightened newspaper—though whether it ever reached the eyes of Desirée, or touched the conscience

of the schoolmistress by those allusions which, though delicately veiled, were still, Cosmo flattered himself, perfectly unmistakeable by the chief actors in the scene, the boy could not tell.

These days of holiday flew, however, as holidays will fly. Cameron's Highland patron had Cosmo introduced to him, and consented that his son should travel in the company of the son of "Mrs. Livingstone, of Norlaw," and the lad went home, full of plans for his journey, to which the Mistress as yet had given only a very vague and general consent, and of which she scarcely still understood the necessity. When Cosmo came home, he had the mid chamber allotted to him as a study, and went to work with devotion. The difficulty was rather how to choose between the narrative in ballad verse, the spirited dramatic sketch, and the historical tale, than how to execute them, for Cosmo had

that facility of language, and even of idea, which many very youthful people, with a "literary turn," (they were very much less common in these days) often possess, to the half-amusement, half-admiration of their seniors and their own intense confusion in maturer days. Literature was not then what it is now, the common resource of most well-educated young men, who do not know what else to do with themselves. It was still a rare glory in that rural district where the mantle of Sir Walter lay only over the great novelist's grave, and had descended upon nobody's shoulders; and as Cosmo went on with his venture, the Mistress, glowing with mother-pride and ambition, hearing the little bits of the "sketch"—eighteen is always dramatical—which seemed, to her loving ears, melodious, and noble, and life-like, almost above comparison, became perfectly willing to consent to anything which was likely to per-



fect this gift of magic. "Though I canna weel see what better they could have," she said to herself, as she went down from Cosmo's study, wiping her eyes. Cosmo's muse had 'sprung, fully equipped, like Minerva, into a glorious existence — at least, so his mother, and so, too, if he had permitted himself to know his own sentiments—perhaps also Cosmo thought.

The arrangement was concluded, at last, on the completion of Cosmo's article. Cameron and his young pupil were to start in August; and the Mistress herself went into Edinburgh to buy her boy-author the handiest of portmanteaus, and everything else which her limited experience thought needful for him; the whole country-side heard of his intended travels, and was stirred with wonder and no small amount of derision. The farmers' wives wondered what the world was coming to, and their husbands shook their heads over the folly

of the widow, who would ruin her son for work all his days. The news was soon carried to Melmar, where Mr. Huntley by no means liked to hear it, where Patricia turned up her little nose with disgust, and where Joanna wished loudly that she was going too, and announced her determination to intrust Cosmo with a letter to Oswald. Even in the manse, the intelligence created a little ferment. Dr. Logan connected it vaguely—he could not quite tell how—with the “Bill,” which the excellent minister feared would revolutionize everything throughout the country, and confound all the ranks and degrees of social life; and shook his head over the idea of Cosmo Livingstone, who had only been one session at college, and was but eighteen, writing in a magazine.

“Depend upon it, Katie, my dear, it’s an unnatural state of things,” said the doctor, whose literature was the literature

of the previous century, and who thought Cosmo's pretensions unsafe for the stability of the country.

And sensible Katie, though she smiled, felt still a little doubtful herself, and, in her secret heart, thought of Huntley, gone away to labour at the other end of the world, while his boy-brother tasted the sweets of luxury and idleness in an indulgence so unusual to his station.

"Poor Huntley!" said Katie to herself, with a gentle recollection of that last scene in the manse parlour, when she mended her children's stockings and smiled at the young emigrant, as he wondered what changes there might be there when he came back. Katie put up her hand very softly to her eyes, and stood a long time in the garden looking down the brae into the village—perhaps only looking at little Colin, who was visible amid some cottage boys on the green bank of Tyne—perhaps thinking of

Cosmo, who was going "to the Continent," — perhaps travelling still further in her thoughts, over a big, solitary sea ; but Katie said "nothing to nobody," and was as blythe and busy in the manse parlours when the minister rejoined her, as though she had not entered with a little sigh.

All this time Cosmo never said a word to his mother of Mary of Melmar ; but he leaped up into the old window of the castle every evening to dream his dream, and a hundred times, in fancy, saw a visionary figure, pale, and lovely, and tender, coming home with him to claim her own. He, too, looked over the woods of Melmar as his brother had done, but with feelings very different — for no impulse of acquisition quickened in the breast of Cosmo. He thought of them as the burden of a romance, the chorus of a ballad—the inheritance to which the long-lost Mary must return ; and while the Mistress stocked his

new portmanteau, and made ready his travelling wardrobe, the lad was hunting everywhere with ungrateful pertinacity for scraps of information to guide him in this search which his mother had not the most distant idea was the real motive of his journey. If she had known it, scarcely even the discovery of her husband's longing after his lost love could have affected the Mistress with more overpowering bitterness and disgust. Marget shut the door when Cosmo came to question her on the subject, and made a vehement address to him under her breath.

“Seek her, if you please,” said Marget, in a violent whisper; “but if your mother ever kens this—sending out her son into the world with a’ this pride and pains for *her* sake—I’d rather the auld castle fell on our heads, Cosmo Livingstone, and crushed every ane of us under a different stane!”

“Hush, Marget! my mother is not unjust,” said Cosmo, with some displeasure.

“She’s no’ unjust; but she’ll no’ be second to a stranger woman that has been the vexation of her life,” said Marget, “spier where ye like, laddie. Ye dinna ken, the like of you, how things sink into folks’ hearts, and bide for years. I ken naething about Mary of Me’mar—neither her married name nor nought else—spier where ye like, but dinna spier at me.”

But it did not make very much matter where Cosmo made inquiry. Never was disappearance more entire and complete than that of Mary of Melmar. He gathered various vague descriptions of her, not quite so poetical in sentiment as Jacob’s, but quite as confusing. She was “a great toast among a’ the lads, and the bonniest woman in the country-side,”—she was “as sweet as a May morning”—she was “neither big nor little, but just the best woman’s size,”—she was, in short, everything that was pretty, indefinite,

and perplexing. And with no clue but this, Cosmo set out, on a windy August morning, on his travels, to improve his mind, and write for the *Auld Reekie Magazine*, as his mother thought—and to seek for the lost heir of the Huntleys, as he himself and the Laird of Melmar knew.

## CHAPTER XIV.

“Ой, papa,” cried Joanna Huntley, bursting into Melmar’s study like a whirlwind, “they’re ill-using Desirée! they shut her out at the door among a crowd, and they threw stones at her, and she might have been killed but for Cosmo Livingstone. I’ll no’ stand it! I’ll rather go and take up a school and work for her mysel’.”

“What’s all this?” said Melmar, looking up in amazement from his newspaper; “another freak about this Frenchwoman—what is she to you?”

“She’s my friend,” said Joanna. “I never



had a friend before, and I never want to have another. You never saw anybody like her in all your life; Melmar's no' good enough for her, if she could get it for her very own—but I think she would come here for me."

"That would be kind," said Mr. Huntley, taking a somewhat noisy pinch of snuff; "but if that's all you have to tell me, it'll keep. Go away and bother your mother; I'm busy to-day."

"You know perfectly well that mamma's no' up," said Joanna, "and if she was up, what's the use of bothering *her*? Now, papa, I'll tell you—I often think you're a very, very ill man—and Patricia says you have a secret, and I know what keeps Oswald year after year away—but I'll forgive you everything if you'll send for Desirée here."

"You little monkey!" cried Melmar, swinging his arm through the air with a menaced blow. It did not fall on Joanna's

cheek, however, and perhaps was not meant to fall—which was all the better for the peace of the household—though feelings of honour or delicacy were not so transcendently high in Melmar as to have made a parental chastisement a deadly affront to the young lady, even had it been inflicted. “You little brat!” repeated the incensed papa, growing red in the face, “how dare you come to me with such a speech—how dare you bother me with a couple of fools like Oswald and Patricia?—begone this moment, or I’ll—”

“No, you will not, papa,” interrupted Joanna, “Oswald’s no’ a fool—and I’m no’ a monkey nor a brat, nor little either—and if anything was to happen, I would never forsake you, whatever you had done—but I like Desirée better than ever I liked anyone—and she knows everything—and she could teach me better than all the masters and mistresses in Edinburgh—and if you don’t send for her here to be my governess, I may

go to school, but I'll never learn a single thing again ! ”

Melmar was perfectly accustomed to be bullied by his youngest child ; he had no ideal of feminine excellence to be shocked by Joanna's rudeness, and in general rather enjoyed it, and took a certain pleasure in the disrespectful straightforwardness of the girl, who in reality was the only member of his family who had any love for him. His momentary passion soon evaporated—he laughed and shook his closed hand at her, no longer threateningly.

“ If you like to grow up a dunce, Joan,” he said, with a chuckle, “ what the deevil matter is't to me ? ”

“ Oh, yes, but it is, though,” said Joanna. “ I know better—you like people to come to Melmar as well as Patricia does—and Patricia never can be very good for anything. She canna draw, though she pretends—and she canna play, and she canna sing, and I could

even dance better myself. It's aye like lessons to see her and hear her—and nobody cares to come to see mamma—it's no' her fault, for she's always in bed or on the sofa; but if *I* like to learn—do you hear, papa?—and I would like if Desirée was here—I know what Melmar might be!”

It was rather odd to look at Joanna, with her long, angular, girl's figure, her red hair, and her bearing which promised nothing so little as the furthest off approach to elegance, and to listen to the confidence and boldness of this self-assertion—even her father laughed—but, perhaps because he was her father, did not fully perceive the grotesque contrast between her appearance and her words; on the contrary, Melmar was considerably impressed with these last, and put faith in them, a great deal more faith than he had ever put in Patricia's prettiness and gentility, cultivated as these had been in the refined atmosphere of the Clapham school.

“You are a vain little blockhead, Joan,” said Mr. Huntley, “which I scarcely looked for—but it’s in the nature of woman. When Aunt Jean leaves you her fortune, we’ll see what a grand figure you’ll make in the country. A French governess, forsooth! the bairn’s crazy. I’ll get her to teach *me*.”

“She could teach you a great many things, papa,” said Joanna, with gravity, “so you need not laugh. I’m going to write to her this moment, and say she’s to come here—and you’re to write to Mrs. Payne and tell her what you’ll give, and how’s she to come, and everything. Desirée is not pleased with Mrs. Payne.”

“What a pity!” said Melmar, laughing; “and possibly, Joan—you ought to consider—Desirée might not be pleased with me?”

“You are kind whiles—when you like, papa,” said Joanna, taking this possibility into serious consideration, and fixing her sharp black

eyes upon her father, with half an entreaty, half a defiance.

Somehow this appeal, which he did not expect, was quite a stroke of victory, and silenced Melmar. He laughed once more in his loud and not very mirthful fashion, and the end of the odd colloquy was, that Joanna conquered, and that, to the utter amazement of mother, sister, and Aunt Jean, the approaching advent of a French governess for Joanna became a recognized event in the house. Patricia spent one good long summer afternoon crying over it.

“No one ever thought of getting a governess for me!” sobbed Patricia, through a deluge of spiteful tears.

And Aunt Jean put up her spectacles from her eyes, and listened to the news which Joanna shouted into her ear, and shook her head.

“If she’s a Papist it’s a tempting of Providence,” said Aunt Jean, “and they’re a’ Papists, if they’re no’ infidels. She may be

nice enough and bonnie enough, but I canna approve of it, Joan. I never had any broo of foreigners a' my days. Deseery? fhat ca' you her name? I like names to be Christian-like for my part. Did ever ye hear that, or the like o' that, in the scriptures? Na, Joan, it's very far from likely she should please me."

"Her name is *Desirée*, and it means desired; it's like a Bible name for that," cried Joanna. "My name means nothing at all that ever I heard of—it's just a copy of a boy's—and I would not have copied a man if anybody had asked me."

"What's that the bairn says?" said Aunt Jean. "I like old-fashioned plain names for my part, but that's to be looked for in an old woman; but I can tell you, Joan, I'm never easy in my mind about French folk—an e never can tell fha they may turn out to be; and 'deed in this house, it's no canny; and I never have ony comfort in my mind about your brother Oswald, kenning faur he was."

“Why is it not canny in this house, Aunt Jean?” asked Joanna.

“Eh, fhat’s that?” said the old woman, who heard perfectly, “fhat’s no canny? just the Pope o’ Rome, Joan, and a’ his develries; and they’re as fu’ o’ wiles, every ane, as if ilka bairn was bred up a priest. Oh, fie, na! you may ca’ her desired, if you like, but she’s no’ desired by me.”

“Desired!” cried Patricia; “a little creature of a governess, that is sure always to be scheming and trying to be taken notice of, and making herself as good as we are. It’s just a great shame! it’s nothing else! no one ever *thought* of a governess for me. But it’s strange how I always get slighted, whatever happens. I don’t think any one in the world cares for me!”

“Fhat’s Patricia greeting about?” said Aunt Jean, “eh, bairns! if I were as young as you I would save up a’ my tears for real troubles. You’ve never kent but good fortune



a' your days, but that's no' to say ill fortune can never come. Whisht then, ye silly thing! I can see you, though I canna hear you. Fhat's she greeting for, Joan? eh! speak louder, I canna hear."

"Because Desirée is coming," shouted Joan.

"Aweel, aweel, maybe I'm little better mysel'," said the old woman. "I'm just a prejudiced auld wife, I like my ain country best—but it's no malice and envie with me; fhat ails Patricia at her for a stranger she doesna ken? She's keen enough about strangers when they come in her ain way. You're a wild lassie, Joan, you're no' just fhat I would like to see you—but there's nae malice in *you*, so far as I ken."

"Oh, Auntie Jean," cried Joanna, with enthusiasm, "wait till you see what I shall be when Desirée comes!"

## CHAPTER XV.

AFTER a little time Desirée came to Melmar. She had been placed in charge of Mrs. Payne by an English lady, who had brought her from her home in France with the intention of making a nursery governess of the little girl, but who, finding her either insufficiently trained or not tractable enough, had transferred her, with the consent of her mother, to the Edinburgh boarding-school as half pupil, half teacher. When Melmar's proposal came, Desirée, still indignant at her present ruler, accepted it eagerly, declared herself quite competent to act independently, and would

not hear of anybody being consulted upon the matter. She herself, the little heroine said, with some state, would inform her mother, and she made her journey accordingly half in spite of Mrs. Payne, who, however, was by no means ill-pleased to transfer so difficult a charge into other hands. Desirée arrived alone on an August afternoon, by the coach, in Kirkbride. The homely little Scotch village, so unlike anything she had seen before, yet so pretty, dwelling on the banks of its little brown stream, pleased the girl's fanciful imagination mightily. Two or three people—among them the servant from Melmar who had come to meet her—stood indolently in the sultry sunshine about the Norlaw Arms. In the shadow of the corner, Bowed Jaacob's weird figure toiled in the glow of the smithy. One or two women were at the door of the cottage which contained the widow's mangle, and the opposite bank lay fair beneath the light, with that white gable of the manse

beaming down among its trees like a smile. The wayward, excitable little Frenchwoman had a tender little heart beneath all her vivacity and caprices. Somehow her eyes sought instinctively that white house on the brae, and instinctively the little girl thought of her mother and sister. Ah, yes, this surely, and not Edinburgh, was her mother's country ! She had never seen it before, yet it seemed familiar to her ; they could be at home here. And thoughts of acquiring that same white house, and bringing her mother to it in triumph, entered the wild little imagination. Women make fortunes in France now and then ; she did not know any better, and she was a child. She vowed to herself to buy the white house on the brae and bring mamma there.

Melmar pleased Desirée, but not so much ; she thought it a great deal too square and like a prison ; and Patricia did not please her at all, as she was not very slow to intimate.

“ Mademoiselle does not love me, Joanna,”

she said to her pupil as they wandered about the banks of Tyne together, "to see everything," as Joanna said before they began their lessons; "and I never can love anyone who does not love me."

"Patricia does not love anybody," cried Joanna, "unless maybe herself, and not herself either—right; but never mind, Desirée, *I* love you, and by-and-bye so will Aunt Jean; and oh! if Oswald would only come home!"

"I hope he will not while I am here," said Desirée, with a little frown; "see! how pretty! the sun streams among the trees; but I do not like Melmar so well as that white house at the village; I should like to live there."

"At the manse?" cried Joanna.

"What is the manse? it is not a great house—would they sell it?" said Desirée.

"Sell it!" Joanna laughed aloud in the contempt of superior knowledge; "but it's

only because you don't know; they could as well sell the church as the manse."

"I don't want the church, however—it's ugly," said Desirée; "but if I had money I should buy that white house and bring mamma and Marie there."

"Eh Desirée! your mamma is English—I heard you say so," cried Joanna.

"*Eh bien!* did I ever tell you otherwise," said the little Frenchwoman, impatiently; "she would love that white house on the hill."

"Did *she* teach you to speak English," asked Joanna, "because everybody says you speak so well for a Frenchwoman—and I think so myself; and papa said you looked quite English to him—and he thought he knew some one like you—and you were not like a foreigner at all."

The pretty little shoulders gave an immediate shrug, which demonstrated their nationality with emphasis.

“Everyone must think what everyone pleases,” said Desirée. “Who then lives in that white house? I remember mamma once spoke of such a house, with a white gable, and a great tree. Mamma loves rivers and trees; I think, when she was a child, she must have been here.”

“Why?” asked Joanna, opening her eyes wide.

“I know not why,” said Desirée, still with a little impatience, as she glanced hurriedly round with a sudden look of half-confused consideration; “but either some one has told me of this place, or I have been here in a dream.”

It was the loveliest dell of Tyne. The banks rose so high on either side, and were so richly dotted with trees, that it was only here and there, through breaks in the foliage, that you could catch a momentary glimpse of the brown river, foaming over a chance rock, or sparkling under some dropping line of sun-

shine which reached it, by sweet caprice and artifice of nature, through an avenue of divided branches. The path where the two girls stood together was at a considerable height above the stream, and close by them, in a miniature ravine, thickly fringed with shrubs, poured down a tiny dazzling water-fall, white as foam against the back-ground of dark soil and rocks, the special feature of the scene. Desirée stood looking at it with her little French hands clasped together, and the chiming of the water woke strange fancies in her mind. Had she seen it somewhere, in fairy-land or in dreams?—or had she heard of it in that time which was as good as either, when she was a child? She stood quite silent, saying nothing to Joanna who soon grew weary of this pause, complimentary as it might be. Desirée was confused and did not know what to make of it. She said no more of the white house, and not much more of her own friends, and kept wondering to herself as



she went back, answering Joanna's questions and talking of their future lessons, what strange sentiment of recollection could have moved her in sight of that water-fall. It was very hard to make it out.

And no doubt it was because Desirée's mother was English, that Aunt Jean could not keep up her prejudice against the foreigner, but gradually lapsed to Joanna's opinion, and day by day fell in love with the little stranger. She was not a very, very good girl—she was rather the reverse, if truth must be told. She had no small amount of pretty little French affectations, and when she was naughty, fell back upon her own language, especially with Patricia, whose Clapham French was not much different from the French of Stratford-atte-Bowe, and who began with vigor and reality to entertain, not a feeble prejudice but a hearty dislike, to the invader. Neither did she do what good governesses are so like to do, at least in

novels ; she did not take the place of her negligent daughters with the invalid Mrs. Huntley, nor remodel the disorderly household. Sometimes, indeed, out of pure hatred to things ugly, Desirée put a sofa-cover straight, or spread down a corner of the crumb-cloth—but she did not captivate the servants, and charm the young ladies into good order and good behaviour. She exercised no very astonishing influence in that way over even Joanna. She was by no means a model young lady in herself, and had no special authority, so far as she was aware of. She taught her pupil, who was one half bigger than herself, to speak French very tolerably, and to practise a certain time every day. She took charge of Joanna's big hands, and twisted and coaxed, and pinched them into a less clumsy thump upon the trembling keys of the piano. She mollified her companion's manners even unconsciously, and suggested improvements in the red hair and brown

merino frock—but having done this, Desirée was not aware of having any special charge of the general morals and well-being of the family. She was rather a critic of the same, indeed—but she was not a Mentor nor a reformer. She obeyed what rules there were in the sloven house—she shrugged her little French shoulders at the discomforts and quarrels. She sometimes pouted, or curled her little disdainful upper lip—but she took nobody's part save Joanna's, whom she always defended manfully. It was not a particularly brilliant or entertaining life for Desirée. Melmar himself, with his grizzled red hair, and heated face—Mrs. Huntley, who sometimes never left her room all day, and who, when she did, lay on a sofa—Patricia, who was spiteful, and did her utmost to shut out both Joanna and Desirée when any visitors came to break the tedium—were not remarkably delightful companions; and as the winter closed in, and there were long evenings, and

less pleasure out of doors—winter, when all the fires looked half choked, and would not burn, and when a perennial fog seemed to lie over Melmar, did not increase the comforts of the house. Yet it happened that Desirée was by no means unhappy—perhaps at sixteen it is hard to be really unhappy, even when one feels one ought, unless one has some very positive reason for it. Joanna and she sat together at the scrambling breakfast which Patricia was always too late for—then they went to the music lesson, which tried Joanna's patience grievously, but which Desirée managed to get some fun out of, and endured with great philosophy. Then they read together, and the unfortunate Joanna inked her fingers over her French exercise. In the afternoon they walked—save when Joanna was compelled to accompany her sister “in the carriage,” a state ceremonial in which the little governess was never privileged to share—and after their return from their walk Desirée

taught her pupil all manner of fine needle-works, in which she herself was more than usually learned, and which branch of knowledge was highly prized by Aunt Joan, and even by Mrs. Huntley. Such was the course of study pursued by Joanna under the charge of her little governess of sixteen.

## CHAPTER XVI.

“A FRENCH governess!—she is not French, though she might be born in France. Anybody might be born in France,” said Patricia, with some scorn; “but her mother was Scotch—no, not English, Joanna, I know better—just some Scotchwoman from the country—I should not wonder if she was a little impostor after all.”

“You had better take care,” cried Joanna, “I’m easier affronted than Desirée—you had better not say much more to me.”

“It is true though,” said Patricia, with

triumph—"she took quite a fancy to Kirkbride, when she came first, and was sure she had heard of the Kelpie waterfall. *I* expect it will turn out some poor family from this quarter that have gone to France and changed their name. Joanna may be as foolish about her as she likes, but *I* know she never was a true Frenchwoman by her look. I have seen French people many a time in England."

"Yet you always look as if you would like to eat Desirée when she speaks to you in French," said Joanna, with a spice of malice; "if you knew French people, you should like the language."

"Low people don't pronounce as ladies do," said Patricia. "Perhaps she was not even born in France, for all she says—and I am *quite* sure her mother was some country girl from near Kirkbride."

"What is that you say?" said Melmar, who was present, and whose attention had at last been caught by the discussion.

“I say Joanna’s French governess is not French, papa. Her mother was a Scotchwoman and came from this country,” cried Patricia, eagerly. “I think she belongs to some poor family who have gone abroad and changed their name — perhaps her father was a poacher, or something, and had to run away.”

“And that is all because Desirée thinks she must have heard her mamma speak of the Kelpie waterfall,” said Joanna; “because she thought she knew it as soon as she saw it—that is all!—did you ever hear the like, papa?”

Melmar’s face grew redder, as was its wont when he was at all disturbed. He laid down his paper.

“She thought she knew the Kelpie, did she?—hum! and her mother is a Scotchwoman—for that matter, so is yours. What is to be made of that, eh, Patricia?”

“I never denied where I belonged to,” said



Patricia, reddening with querulous anger; “and I did not speak to you, papa, so you need not take the trouble to answer. But her mother *was* Scotch—and I do not believe she is a proper Frenchwoman at all. I never did think so; and as for a governess, Joanna could learn as much from mamma’s maid.”

Joanna burst out immediately into a loud defence, and denunciation of her sister. Melmar took no notice whatever of their quarrel, but he still grew redder in the face, twisted about his newspaper, got up and walked to the window, and displayed a general uneasiness. He was perfectly indifferent as to the tone and bearing of his daughters, but he was not indifferent to what they said in this quarrel, which was all about Desirée. Presently, however, both the voices ceased with some abruptness. Melmar looked round with curiosity. Desirée herself had entered the room—and what his presence had not even checked, her presence put an end to.

Desirée wore a brown merino frock, like Joanna, with a little band and buckle round the waist, and sleeves which were puffed out at the shoulders, and plain at the wrists, according to the fashion of the time. It had no ornament whatever except a narrow binding of velvet at the neck and sleeves, and was not so long as to hide the handsome little feet, which were not in velvet slippers, but in stout little shoes of patent leather, more suitable a great deal for Melmar, and the place she held there. The said little feet came in lightly, yet not noiselessly, and both the sisters turned with an immediate acknowledgment of the stranger's entrance. Patricia's delicate pink cheeks were flushed with anger, and Joanna looked eager and defiant, but quarrels were so very common between them that Desirée took no notice of this one. She came to a table near which Melmar was standing, and opened a drawer in it to get Joanna's needlework.

“You promised to have—oh, such an impossible piece, done to-day!” said Desirée, “and look, you naughty Joanna!—look here.”

She shook out a delicate piece of embroidery as she spoke, with a merry laugh. It was a highly-instructive bit of work, done in a regular succession of the most delicate perfection and the utmost bungling, to wit, Desirée’s own performance and the performance of her pupil. As the little governess clapped her hands over it, Joanna drew near and put her arms round the waist of her young teacher, overtopping her by all her own red head and half her big shoulders.

“I’ll never do it like you, Desirée,” said the girl, half in real affection, half with the benevolent purpose of aggravating her sister. “I’ll never do anything so well as you, if I live to be as old as Aunt Jean.”

“Ah, then, you will need no governess,” said Desirée, “and if you did it as well as I,

now, you should not want me, Joanna. I shall leave it for you there—and now it is time to come for one little half-hour to the music. Will mademoiselle do us the honour to come and listen? It shall be only one little half-hour.”

“No, thank you! I don’t care to hear girls at their lessons—and Joanna’s time is always so bad,” said the fretful Patricia. “Oh, I can’t help having an ear! I can hear only too well, thank you, where I am.”

Desirée made a very slight smiling curtsy to her opponent, and pressed Joanna’s arm lightly with her fingers to keep down the retort which trembled on that young lady’s lips. Then they went away together to the little supplementary musical lesson. Melmar had never turned round, nor taken the slightest notice, but he observed, notwithstanding, not only all that was done, but all that was looked and said, and it struck him, perhaps for the first time, that the English of Desirée was per-

fectly familiar and harmonious English, and that she never either paused for a word nor translated the idiom of one tongue into the speech of another. Uneasy suspicions began to play about his mind: he could scarcely say what he feared, yet he feared something. The little governess was French, undeniably and emphatically—and yet she was not French, either, yet bore an unexplainable something of familiarity and homelikeness which had won for her the heart of Aunt Jean, and had startled himself unawares from her first introduction to Melmar. He stood at the window, looking out upon the blank, winterly landscape, the leafless trees in the distance, the damp grass and evergreens near the door, as the cheerful notes of Joanna's music came stealing through the cold passages. The music was not in bad time, and it was in good taste, for Joanna was ambitious, and Desirée, though not an extraordinary musician herself, kept her pupil to this study with the most te-

nacious perseverance. As Melmar listened, vague thoughts, almost of fear, stole over him. He had been a lawyer, and a lawyer of a low class, smart in schemes and trickeries. He was ready to suspect everybody of cunning and the mean cleverness of deceit. Perhaps this was a little spy whom he fostered in his house. Perhaps her presence in the Edinburgh school was a trick to attract Joanna, and her presence here a successful plot to undermine and find out himself. His face grew redder still as he “put things together;” and by the time the music ceased, Melmar had concocted and found out (it is so easy to find out what one has concocted one’s own self,) a very pretty little conspiracy. He *had* found it out, he was persuaded, and it should go no further—trust him for that!

Accordingly, when his daughter and her governess returned, Melmar paid them a compliment upon their music, and was disposed to be friendly, as it appeared. Finally, after he

had exhausted such subjects of chat as occurred to him, he got up, looking at Desirée, who was now busy with her embroidery.

“I rather think, mademoiselle, you have been more than three months here,” said Melmar, “and I have been inconsiderate and ungallant enough to forget the time. I’ll speak with you about that in my study, if you’ll favour me by coming there. I never speak of business but in my own room—eh, Joan? You got your thrashings there when you were young enough. Where does mademoiselle give you them now?”

“Don’t be foolish, papa,” said Joanna, jerking her head aside as he pinched her ear. “What do you want with Desirée? if it’s for Patricia, and you’re going to teaze her, I’ll not let her go, whatever you say.”

“And it is not quite three months, yet,” said Desirée, looking up with a smile. “Monsieur is too kind, but it still wants a week of the time.”

“Then, lest I should forget again when the week was over, we’ll settle it now, mademoiselle,” said Melmar. Desirée rose immediately to follow him. They went away through the long passage, he leading, suspicious and stealthy, she going after him, with the little feet which rang frankly upon the stones. Desirée thought the study miserable when she went into it. She longed to throw open the window, to clear out the choked fire—she did not wonder that her pupil’s papa had a heated face, even before dinner; the wonder seemed how anyone could breathe here.

They had a conference of some duration, which gradually diverged from Desirée’s little salary, which was a matter easily settled. Mr. Huntley took an interest in her family. He asked a great many questions, which the girl answered with a certain frankness and a certain reserve, the frankness being her own, and the reserve attributable to a letter which Desirée kept in her pocket, and beyond the instruc-



tions of which nothing could have tempted her to pass. Mr. Huntley learned a great deal during that interview, though not exactly what he expected and intended to learn. The afternoon was darkening, and as he sat in the dubious light, with the window and the yew-tree on the other side of him, he became more and more like the big, brindled, watchful cat, which he had so great a tendency to resemble. Then he dismissed “Mademoiselle” with a kindly caution. He thought she had better not mention—not even to any one in the house, that her mother was a Scotchwoman—as she was French herself, he thought the less said about that the better—he would not even speak of it much to Joanna, he thought, if she would take his advice—it might injure her prospects in life—and with this fatherly advice he sent Desirée away.

When she was gone, he looked out stealthily for some one else, though he had taken previous precautions to make sure that no one

could listen. It was Patricia for whom her father looked, poor little delicate Patricia, who *would* steal about those stone-cold passages, and linger in all manner of draughts at half-closed doors, to gain a little clandestine information. When Melmar had watched a few minutes, he discovered her stealing out of a little store-room close by, and pounced upon the poor little stealthy, chilly figure. He did not care that the grasp of his fingers hurt her delicate shoulders, and that her teeth chattered with cold; he drew her roughly into the dusk of the study, where the pale window and the black yew were by no means counterbalanced by any light from the fire. Once here, Patricia began to vindicate herself, and upbraid papa's cruelty. Her father silenced her with a threatening gesture.

"At it again!" said Melmar; "what the deevil business have you with my affairs? let me but catch you prying when there is anything to learn, and, for all your airs, I'll punish

you! you little cankered elf! hold your tongue, and hear what I have to say to you. If I hear another word against that governess, French or no French—or if you try your hand at aggravating her, as I know you have done, I'll turn you out of this house!"

For once in her life Patricia was speechless; she made no answer, but stood shivering in his grasp, with a hundred terrified malicious fancies in her mind, not one of which would come to utterance. Melmar proceeded:—

"If anybody asks you who she is, or what she is, you can tell them *I* know—which is more than you know, or she either—and if you let any mortal suppose she's slighted at Melmar, or give her ground to take offence, or are the means of making her wish to leave this place—if it should be midnight, or the depth of winter, I'll turn you out of doors that moment! Do you hear?"

Patricia did hear, with sullen terror and wicked passion, but she did not answer; and

when she was released, fled to her own room, ready, out of the mere impotence of her revengeful ill-humour to harm herself, since she could not harm Desirée, and with all kinds of vile suspicions in her mind—suspicions further from the reality than Melmar's had been, and still more miserable. When she came to herself a little, she cried and made her eyes red, and got a headache, and the supernumerary maid was despatched up-stairs to nurse her, and be tormented for the evening. Suffering is very often vicarious in this world, and poor Jenny Shaw bore the brunt, which Desirée was not permitted to bear.

## CHAPTER XVII.

“ I SHOULD like to live here,” said Desirée, looking out of the window of the manse parlour, with a little sigh.

Katie Logan looked up at her with some little doubt. She had come by herself to the manse, in advance of Joanna, who had been detained to accompany her sister. The two girls had been invited some time before to “take tea” at the manse—and Desirée had been very curious and interested about her first visit to her white house on the hill. Now that she had accomplished it, however, it subdued her spirit a little, and gave the

little Frenchwoman for once a considerable inclination to get "low," and cry. The house and the room were very unlike any house she had ever known—yet they were so homelike that Desirée's thoughts grew tender. And Katie Logan looked at her doubtfully. Desirée's impulsive little heart had clung to Katie every time she saw her. She was so sweet and neat—so modest and natural—so unlike Patricia and Joanna, and all the womankind of that sloven house of Melmar. The girl who had a mother and an elder sister, and was far from home, yearned to Katie—but the little mistress of the manse looked with doubt upon the French governess—principally, to tell the truth, because she was French, and Katie Logan, with all her good sense, was only a country girl, and had but a very, very small experience of any world beyond Kirkbride.

"Mamma came from this country," said Desirée, again, softly. She had a letter in

her pocket—rather a sentimental letter—from mamma, which perhaps a wiser person might have smiled at a little—but it made Desirée's heart expand towards the places which mamma too had seen in her youth, and remembered still.

“Indeed! then you are a little bit Scotch, you are not all French,” said Katie, brightening a little; “is it very long since your mamma went away?—is she in France now? Is she likely to come back again?”

Desirée shook her head.

“I should like to be rich, and buy this house, and bring her here—I love this house,” cried the girl.

A little cloud came upon Katie's face. She was jealous of any inference that some time or other the manse might change hands. She could not bear to think of that—principally because Katie had begun to find out with painful anxiety and fear, that her father was growing old, that he felt the opening chill of

winter a great deal more than he used to do, —and that the old people in the village shook their heads, and said to themselves that the minister was “failing” every time he passed their doors.

“This house can never be sold,” said Katie, briefly—even so briefly as though the words were rather hard to say.

“It is not like Melmar,” said Desirée. “I want the air and the sun to come into that great house.—It cannot breathe—and how the people breathe in it I do not know.”

“But they are very kind people,” said Katie, quickly.

Desirée lifted her black eyes and looked full at her—but Katie was working and did not meet the look.

“Joanna is fond of you,” said Desirée, “and I like her—and I am fond of the old lady whom they call Aunt Jean.”

This distinct summary of the amount of her affection for the household amused Katie,



who was half afraid of a governess-complaint against her employers.

“Do you like to be so far from home?” she said.

“Like!” Desiree became suddenly vehement. “I should like to live with mamma—but,” cried the girl, “how could you ask me?—do not *you* know?”

“I have no mother,” said Katie, very quietly, “boys are always eager to leave home—girls might sometimes wish it too. Do you know Cosmo Livingstone, whom you saw in Edinburgh, has gone abroad for no reason at all that I know—and his brothers have both gone to work, and make their fortunes if they can—and my little brothers speak already of what they are going to do when they grow men—they will all go away.”

“In this country people always talk of making fortunes. I should like to make a fortune too,” said Desirée, “but I do not know what to do.”

“Girls never make fortunes,” said Katie, with a smile.

“Why?” cried the little governess, “but I wish it—yes, very much—though I do not know how to do it; here I have just twenty pounds a-year. What should you do if you had no papa, and had to work for yourself.”

Katie rose from her chair in trouble and excitement.

“Don’t speak so—you frighten me!” she cried, with an involuntary pang. “I have all the children. You do not understand it—you must not speak of *that*.”

“Of what?” asked Desirée, with a little astonishment. But she changed the subject with ready tact when she saw the painful colour on Katie’s face. “I should like mamma to see you,” she said, in a vein of perfectly natural and sincere flattery. “When I tell her what kind of people I live among, I do not speak of mademoiselle at Melmar, or even of Joanna—I tell her of

you, and then she is happy—she thinks poor little Desirée is very well where she is with such as these.”

“I am afraid you are too good to me,” said Katie, with a half conscious laugh—“you don’t know me well enough yet—is it Patricia whom you call mademoiselle?”

Desirée shrugged her little shoulders slightly; she gave no other answer, but once more looked out from the window down the pretty brae of Tyne, where all the cottages were so much the clearer from the winterly brown aspect of the trees, stripped of their foliage. It was not like any other scene familiar to Desirée, still it did seem familiar to her—she could not tell how—as if she had known it all her life.

“Does Cosmo Livingstone, whom you spoke of, live near?” asked Desirée, “and will you tell me of *his* mother? Is she by herself, now that all her boys are gone?—is she a lady? are they great people or are they poor? Joanna speaks of a great old castle, and I

think I saw it from the road. They must be great people if they lived there."

"They are not great people now," said Katie, the colour warming in her cheek—"yet the castle belonged to them once, and they were different. But they are good people still."

"I should like to hear about them," said Desirée, suddenly coming up to Katie, and sitting down on a stool by her feet. Katie Logan was slightly flattered, in spite of herself. She thought it very foolish, but she could not help it. Once more a lively crimson kindled in her cheek. She bent over her work with great earnestness, and never turned her eyes towards the questioning face of the girl.

"I could not describe the Mistress if I were to try all day," said Katie at last, in a little burst, after having deliberated. Desirée looked up at her very steadily, with grave curiosity.

“And that is what I want most,” said the little Frenchwoman. “What! can you not tell if she has black eyes or blue ones, light hair or dark hair?—was she pretty before she grew old—and does she love her boys—and did her husband love her? I want to know all that.”

Desirée spoke in the tone of one who had received all these questions from another person, and who asked them with a point-blank quietness and gravity, for the satisfaction of some other curiosity than her own; but the investigation was half amusing, half irritating to Katie. She shook her head slightly, with a gesture expressing much the same sentiment as the movement of her hand, which drew away the skirts on which Desirée almost leaned. Her doubt changed into a more positive feeling. Katie rather feared Desirée was about to fulfil all her unfavourable anticipations as to the quality of French governesses.

“Don’t go away,” said Desirée, laying her little white hand upon the dress which Katie withdrew from her touch. “I like to sit by you—I like to be near you—and I want to hear; not for me. Tell me only what you please, but let me sit here till Joanna comes.”

There was a little pause. Katie was moved slightly, but did not know what to say, and Desirée, too, sat silent, whether waiting for her answer, or thinking, Katie could not tell. At last she spoke again with emotion, grasping Katie’s dress.

“I like Joanna,” said Desirée, with tears upon her eyelashes—“but I am older than she is—a great deal older—and no one else cares for me. You do not care for me—it is not likely; but let me sit here and forget all that house and everything till Joanna comes. Ah, let me! I am far away from home—I am a little beggar-girl, begging at your window—not for crumbs, or for sous, but for love. I am so lonely. I do not think of it always—

but I have thought so long and so often of coming here."

"You must come oftener then," said Katie, who, unused to any demonstration, did not quite know what to say.

"I cannot come often," said Desirée, softly, "but let me sit by you and forget all the others—only for a very, very little time—only till Joanna comes. Ah, she is here!"

And the little Frenchwoman shrugged her shoulders, and ran to the window to look out, and came back with a swift gliding motion to take Katie's hand out of her work and kiss it. Katie was surprised, startled, moved. She did not half understand it, and she blushed, though the lips which touched her hand were only those of a girl; but almost before she could speak, Desirée had sprung up again, and stood before her with a smile, winking her pretty long eyelashes to clear them of those wayward April tears. She was very pretty, very young, with her little foreign

graces. Katie did not understand the rapid little girl, who darted from one thought to another, so quickly, yet with such evident truthfulness—but her heart was touched and surprised. Joanna came in immediately, to put an end to any further confidences. Joanna, loudly indignant at Patricia's selfishness, and making most audible and uncompromising comparisons between Melmar and the manse, which Desirée skilfully diverted, soothed, and gradually reduced to silence, to Katie's much amazement. On the whole, it was a very pleasant little tea-party to everybody concerned; but Katie Logan, when she stood at the door in the clear frosty moonlight, looking after her young guests, driving away in the double gig which had been sent for them, still doubted and wondered about Desirée, though with a kindly instead of an unfavourable sentiment. What could the little capricious foreigner mean, for instance, by such close questions about Norlaw?



## CHAPTER XVIII.

AT Norlaw everything was very quiet, very still in this early winter. The “beasts” were thriving, the dairy was prosperous, the Mistress’ surplus fund—spite of the fifty pounds which had been given out of it to Cosmc—grew at the bank. Willie Noble, the factotum, lived in his cosy cottage at a little distance, and throve—but no one knew very well how the Mistress and Marget lived by themselves in that deserted house. No one could have told any external difference in the house, save for its quietness. It was cheerful to look upon in the ruddy winter sunshine, when the

glimmer of the fire shone in the windows of the dining-parlour, and through the open door of Marget's kitchen; and not even the close pressure of the widow's cap could bring decay or melancholy to the living looks of the Mistress, who still was not old, and had much to do yet in the world where her three boys were wandering. But it was impossible to deny that both Mistress and servant had a little dread of the long evenings. They preferred getting up hours before daylight, when, though it was dark, it was morning, and the labours of the day could be begun—they took no pleasure in the night.

It was a habitual custom with the minister, and had been for years, to “take tea” occasionally, now and then, without previous invitation, at Norlaw. When Dr. Logan was new in his pastorate, he thought this device of dropping in to take tea the most admirable plan ever invented for “becoming acquainted with his people,” and winning their affections;

and what was commenced as a famous piece of wisdom, had fallen years ago into natural use and wont, a great improvement upon policy. From the same astute reasoning, it had been the fancy of the excellent minister, whose schemes were all very transparent, and, indeed, unconcealable, to take Katie with him in these domestic visitations. "It pleased the people," Dr. Logan thought, and increased the influence of the ecclesiastical establishment. The good man was rather complacent about the manner in which he had conquered the affections of his parish. It was done by the most elaborate statesmanship, if you believed Dr. Logan, and he told the young pastors, with great satisfaction, the history of his simple devices, little witting that his devices were as harmless as they were transparent, and that it was himself, and not his wisdom, which took the heart of his people. But in the meantime, those plans of his had come to be the course of nature, and so it was

that Katie Logan found herself seated with her work in the Norlaw dining-parlour at sunset of a wintry afternoon, which was not exactly the day that either she or the Mistress would have chosen for her visit there.

For that day the Mistress had heard from her eldest son. Huntley had reached Australia—had made his beginning of life—had written a long, full-detailed letter to his mother, rich in such particulars as mothers love to know; and on that very afternoon Katie Logan came with her father to Norlaw. Now in her heart the Mistress liked Katie as well, perhaps better, than she liked any other stranger out of the narrow magic circle of her own blood and family—but the Mistress was warm of temper and a little unreasonable. She could not admit the slightest right on Katie's part, or on the part of any "fremd person," to share in the communication of her son. She resented the visit which interrupted her in the midst of her happiness and excite-

ment with a suggestion of some one else who might claim a share in Huntley. She knew they were not lovers, she knew that not the shadow of an engagement bound these two, she believed that they had never spoken a word to each other which all the world might not have heard—yet, notwithstanding all these certainties, the Mistress was clear-sighted, and had the prevision of love in her eyes, and with the wildest unreasonableness she resented the coming of Katie, of all other days in the year, upon that day.

“She needna have been in such an awfu’ hurry; she might have waited a while, if it had only been for the thought of what folk might say,” muttered the Mistress to herself, very well knowing all the time, though she would not acknowledge it to herself, that Katie Logan had no means whatever of knowing what precious missive had come in the Kirkbride letter-bag that day.

And when the Mistress intimated the fact

with a little heat and excitement, Katie blushed and felt uncomfortable. She was conscious too ; she did not like to ask a natural question about Huntley. She sat embarrassed at the homely tea-table, looking at the cream scones which Marget had made in honor of the minister, while Dr. Logan and the Mistress kept up the conversation between them—and when her father rose after tea to go out, as was his custom, to call at the nearest cottages, Katie would fain have gone too, had that not been too great an invasion of established rule and custom, to pass without immediate notice. She sat still accordingly by the table with her work, the Mistress sitting opposite with *her* work also, and her mind intent upon Huntley's letter. The room was very still and dim, with its long background of shade, sometimes invaded by a red glimmer of fire, but scarcely influenced by the steady light of the two candles, illuminating those two faces by the table ; and the Mistress and her visitor sat in

silence without any sound but the motion of their hands, and the little rustle of their elbows as they worked. This silence became very embarrassing after a few minutes, and Katie broke it at last by an enquiry after Cosmo—where was he when his mother heard last?

“The laddie is a complete wanderer,” said the Mistress, not without a little complacence. “I could not undertake to mind for my part, all the places he’s been in—though they’re a’ names you see in books—he’s been in Eetaly, and he’s been in Germany, and now he’s back again in France, but I canna say he forgets hame either,” she added, with a tender pride, “only the like of him must improve his mind; and foreign travel, folk say, is good for that—though I canna say I ever had much to do with foreigners, or likit them mysel’.”

“Did you ever hear of any one from this country marrying a Frenchman, Mrs. Livingstone?” asked Katie.

“Marrying a Frenchman? I’ll warrant have I—it’s no’ such a great wonder, but the like of me might hear tell of it in a lifetime,” said the Mistress, with a little offence, “but marriage is no’ aye running in everybody’s head, Miss Katie, and there’s little fear of my Cosmo bringing me hame a French wife.”

“No, I did not think of that,” said Katie, with a smile, “I was thinking of the little French governess at Melmar, whose mother, they say, came from this quarter, or near it. She is an odd little girl and yet I like her—Cosmo saw her in Edinburgh, and she was very anxious when she came to the manse to hear about Norlaw. I thought perhaps you might have known who her mother was.”

The Mistress was slightly startled—she looked up at Katie quickly, with a sparkle of impatience in her eye, and a rising colour.

“Me!” said the Mistress. “How should I ken? There might have been a hundred young women in the country-side married



upon Frenchmen for anything I could tell. 'This quarter' is a wide word. I ken nae mair about Melrose and what happens there, wha's married or wha dies, than if it was a thousand miles away. And many a person has heard tell of Norlaw that I ken naething about, and that never heard tell of me."

Katie paused to consider after this. She knew and understood so much of the Mistress's character that she neither took offence nor wished to excite it. This had not been a quite successful essay at conversation, and Katie took a little time to think before she began again.

But while Katie's thoughts left this subject, those of the Mistress held to it. Silence fell upon them again, disturbed only by the rustle of their sleeves as they worked, and the crackle of the fire, which burned brightly, when suddenly the Mistress asked:—

"What like is she?" with an abruptness which took away Katie's breath.

“She?”—it required an effort to remember that this was Desirée of whom they had been speaking — “the little girl at Melmar?” asked Katie. “She is little and bright, and pretty, with very dark eyes and dark hair, a quick little creature, like a bird or a fairy. I confess I was half afraid of her, because she was French,” admitted the little mistress of the manse, with a blush and a laugh, “but she is a very sweet, winning little girl, with pretty red lips, and white teeth, and black eyes—very little—less than me.”

The Mistress drew a long breath, and looked relieved.

“I do not know anything about her,” she said slowly; and it seemed quite a comfort to the Mistress to be able to say so, distinctly and impartially. “And so she’s at Melmar—a governess—what is that for, Katie? The oldest is woman grown, and the youngest is more like a laddie than a lassie. What are they wanting with a governess? I canna say

I ken much of the present family mysel', though my Huntley, if he had but sought his ain, as he might have done—but you'll hear a' that through your cousin, without me."

"No," said Katie.

"Ah, Katie Logan! you speak softly and fairly, and you're a good lassie, and a comfort to the house you belong to," cried the Mistress. "I ken a' that, and I never denied it a' your days! but my Huntley! do you ken what that laddie did before he went away? He had a grand lairdship within his hand if he would gang to the law and fight it out as the very writer, your ain cousin, advised him to do. But my son said, 'No; I'll leave my mother her house and her comfort, though they're a' mine,' said my Huntley. 'I'll gang and make the siller first to fight the battle with.' And yonder he is, away at the end of the world, amang his beasts and his toils. He wouldna listen to me. I would have lived in a cothouse or one

room, or worked for my bread rather than stand in the way of my son's fortune; but Huntley's a man grown, and maun have his way; and the proud callant had that in his heart that he would make his mother as safe as a queen in her ain house before he would think of either fortune or comfort for himsel'!"

The Mistress's voice was broken with her mother-grief, and pride, and triumph. It was, perhaps, the first time she had opened her heart so far—and it was to Katie, whose visit she had resented, and whose secret hold on Huntley's heart was no particular delight to his mother. But even in the midst of the angry impatience with which the Mistress refused to admit a share in her son's affections, she could not resist the charm of sympathy, the grateful fascination of having some one beside her to whom everything concerning Huntley was almost as interesting as to herself. Huntley's uncommunicated letter was very near running over out of her full heart, and that half

apologetic, half defiant burst of feeling was the first opening of the tide. Katie's eyes were wet—she could not help it—and they were shining and glowing behind their tears, abashed, proud, joyous, tender, saying what lips cannot say—she glanced up with all her heart in them, at the Mistress, and said something which broke down in a half sob, half laugh, half sigh, and was wholly and entirely inarticulate, though not so unintelligible as one might have supposed. It was a great deal better than words, so far as the Mistress was concerned—it expressed what was inexpressible—the sweet, generous tumult in the girl's heart—too shy even to name Huntley's name, too delicate to approve, yet proud and touched to its depths with an emotion beyond telling. The two women did not rush into each other's arms after this spontaneous burst of mutual confidence. On the contrary, they sat each at her work—the Mistress hurriedly wiping off her tears, and Katie

trying to keep hers from falling, if that were possible, and keeping her eyes upon the little glancing needle, which flashed in all manner of colours through the sweet moisture which filled them. Ah! that dim, silent dining-parlour which now there was neither father nor children to fill and bless!—perhaps by the solitary fireside, where she had sat for so many hours of silent night, alone commanding her heart, a new, tender, soothing, unlooked-for relationship suddenly surprised the thoughts of the Mistress. She had not desired it, she had not sought it, yet all at once, almost against her will, a freshness came to her heart like the freshness after showers. Something had happened to Huntley's mother—she had an additional comfort in the world after to-night.

But when Dr. Logan returned, after seeing Willie Noble, the good minister, with pleasant consciousness of having done his duty, was not disturbed by any revelation on

the part of the Mistress, or confession from his daughter. He heard a great many extracts read from Huntley's letter, feeling it perfectly natural and proper that he should hear them, and expressing his interest with the great friendliness and good pleasure ; and then Marget was called in, and the minister conducted family worship, and prayed with fervour for the widow's absent sons, like a patriarch. "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil bless the lads," said the minister in his prayer ; and then he craved a special blessing on the firstborn, that he might return with joy, and see the face of his mother, and comfort her declining years. Then the excellent pastor rose from his knees placidly, and shook the Mistress' hand, and wended his quiet way down Tyne through the frosty moonlight, with his daughter on his arm. He thought the Mistress was pleased to see them, and that Katie had been a comfort to her to-night. He thought it was a very fine

night, and a beautiful moon, and there was Orion, Katie, and the Plough; and so Dr. Logan went peacefully home, and thought he had spent a very profitable night.



## CHAPTER XIX.

It was frost, and Tyne was "bearing" at Kirkbride, where the village held a carnival of sliding and skating, and where even the national winter sport, the yearly curling, matches began to be talked of. There was, however, no one at Melmar to tempt Tyne to "bear," even had it been easy to reach his glassy surface through the slippery whitened trees, every twig of which was white and stiff with congealed dew. The Kelpie fell scantily, with a drowsing tinkle over its little ravine, reduced to the slenderest thread, while all the branches near it were hung with mocking icicles. The sun was high in the

blue, frosty midday skies, but had only power enough to clear here and there an exposed branch, and to moisten the path where some little burn crept half frozen under a crust of ice. It was a clear, bracing, invigorating day, and Joanna and Desirée, spite of the frost, were on Tyne-side among the frozen woods.

When standing close together, investigating a bit of moss, both simultaneously heard a crackling footstep among the underwood, and turning round at the same moment, saw some one approaching from the house. He was one of her own coutrymen, Desirée thought, with a little flutter at her heart. He wore a large blue cloak, with an immense fur collar, a very French hat, a moustache, and long black hair; Desirée gazed at him with her heart in her eyes, and her white little French hands clasped together. No doubt he brought some message from mamma. But Desirée's hopes were brought to an abrupt conclusion when Joanna sprang forward, exclaiming:—

“Oh, Oswald, Oswald! have you really come home. I am so glad you have come home!” with a plunge of welcome which the stranger looked half annoyed, half pleased to encounter. He made a brotherly response to it by stooping to kiss Joanna, a salutation which the girl underwent with a heightened colour, and a half-ashamed look; she had meant to shake both his hands violently; anything in the shape of an embrace being much out of Joanna’s way—but Oswald’s hands were occupied with his cloak, which he could not permit to fall from his shoulders in the fervour of his brotherly pleasure. Holding it fast, he had only half a hand to give, which Joanna straightway possessed herself of, repeating as she did so her cry of pleasure: “Oh, Oswald, how glad I am! I have wished for such a long time that you would come home!”

“It was very kind of my little sister—or should I say my big sister,” said the stranger, looking gallant and courtier-like, “but why,

may I ask, were you so anxious for me now? that was a sudden thought, Joanna."

Joanna grew very red as she looked up in his face—then unconsciously she looked at Desirée. Mr. Oswald Huntley was a man of the world, and understood the ways and fancies of young ladies—at least he thought so. He followed Joanna's glance, and a comical smile came to his lips. He took off his hat with an air half mocking, half reverential.

"May I hope to be introduced to your friend, Joanna," said the new-found brother. With great haste, heat, and perturbation, blushing fiery red, and feeling very uncomfortable, Joanna stumbled through this ceremony, longing for some private means of informing the new-comer who "her friend," was, ere accident or Patricia made him unfavourably aware of it. He was a little amazed evidently by the half-pronounced, half-intelligible name.

"Mademoiselle Desirée?" he repeated after

Joanna, with an evident uncertainty, and an air of great surprise.

“Oh, Oswald, you have never got my last letter,” cried Joanna, “did you really not know that Desirée was here?”

“I am the governess,” cried Desirée, with immense pride and dignity, elevating her little head and drawing up her small figure. Patricia had done her best during these three months to annoy and humiliate the little Frenchwoman—but her pride had never been really touched until to-day.

Oswald’s countenance cleared immediately into suavity and good-humour—he smiled, but he bowed, and looked with great graciousness upon the two girls. He could see at a glance how pretty and graceful was this addition to the household of Melmar—and Oswald Huntley was a dilettanti. He liked a pretty person as well as a pretty picture. He begged to know how they could find any pleasure out of doors in this ferocious climate on such a day

—and with a glance, and a shrug and a shiver at the frosty languor of the diminished Kelpie, drew his cloak close round him, and turned towards the house, whither, Joanna eagerly, and Desirée with great reluctance and annoyance, the girls were constrained to follow. He walked between them, inclining his ear to his sister, who overwhelmed him with questions, yet addressing now and then a courteous observation to Desirée, which gradually mollified that little lady. He was a great deal more agreeable than Melmar or than Patricia—he was something new in the house at least—he knew her own country, perhaps her own very town and house. Desirée became much softened as they drew near the house, and she found herself able to withdraw and leave the brother and sister together. To know the real value of a new face and a new voice, one needs to live for a long winter in a country house like Melmar, whose hospitality was not very greatly prized in the countryside.

Desirée had quite got over her anger by the time she reached her own apartment. She made rather a pretty toilet for the evening, and was pleased, in spite of herself, that there would be some one else to talk to besides Melmar, and Aunt Jean, and Joanna. The whole house, indeed, was moved with excitement. A dark Italian servant, whom he had brought with him, was regulating with a thermometer, to the dismay and wonder of all the maids, the temperature of Mr. Oswald's room, where these unscientific functionaries had put on a great, uncomfortable fire, piled half-way up the chimney. Patricia had entered among them to peer over her brother's locked trunks, and see if there was anything discoverable by curiosity. Mrs. Huntley was getting up in haste to see her son, and even Aunt Jean trotted up and down stairs on her nimble little feet, on errands of investigation and assistance. It made no small commotion in the house when the only son of Melmar came home.

Oswald Huntley, but for his dark hair, was like his sister Patricia. He was tall, but of a delicate form, and had small features, and a faint colour which said little for his strength. When they all met together in the evening, the travelled son was by much the most elegant member of the household circle. His dainty, varnished boots, his delicate white hands, his fine embroidered linen, filled Joanna with a sentiment which was half impatience and half admiration. Joanna would rather have had Oswald despise these delicacies of apparel, which did not suit with her ideal of manhood. At the same time she had never seen anything like them, and they dazzled her. As for Patricia, she looked from her brother to herself, and coloured red with envious displeasure. One of Oswald's rings would have purchased everything in the shape of jewellery which Patricia ever had or hoped for—his valet, his dress, his “style,” at once awed and irritated his unfor-



tunate sister. If papa could afford to keep Oswald thus, was it not a disgrace to confine "me!" within the tedious bounds of this country house. Poor little Patricia could have cried with envy and self pity.

In the meantime, Oswald made himself very agreeable, and drew the little party together as they seldom were drawn. His mother sat up in her easy chair, looking almost pretty with her pink cheeks, and for once without any invalid accompaniments of barley-water or cut oranges. Melmar himself stayed in the drawing-room all the evening, displaying his satisfaction by some occasional rude fun with Joanna and jokes at "Mademoiselle," and listening to his son very complacently though he seldom addressed him. Aunt Jean had drawn her chair close to Mrs. Huntley, and seriously inclined, not her ear only, which was but a dull medium, but the lively black eyes with which she seemed almost able to hear as well as see. Joanna

hung upon her mother's footstool, eagerly and perpetually asking questions. The only one out of the family group was Desirée, who kept apart, working at her embroidery, but whom Mr. Oswald by no means neglected. The new comer had good taste. He thought the little table which held the governess's thread and scissors, and little crimson work-bag, and the little chair close by, where the little governess herself sat working with her pretty white hands, her graceful girlish dress, her dark hair in which the light shone, and her well-formed, well-poised head bending over her embroidery, was the prettiest bit in the room, and well worth looking at. He looked at it accordingly as he talked, distributing his favours impartially among the family, and wondered a little who this little girl might be, and what brought her here. When Oswald stooped forward to say something politely to the little Frenchwoman—when he brought a flush to her cheek by

addressing her in her own language, though Desirée's own good sense taught her that it was best to reply in English—when he pronounced himself a connoisseur in embroidery, and inspected the pretty work in her hands—his ailing mother and his deaf aunt, as well as the spiteful Patricia, simultaneously perceived something alarming in the courtesy. Desirée was very young and very pretty, and Oswald was capricious, fanciful, and the heir of Melmar. What if the little governess, sixteen years old, should captivate the son, who was only five-and-twenty? The fear sprang from one feminine mind to another, of all save Joanna, who had already given her thoughts to this catastrophe as the most desirable thing in the world. Oswald's experience and knowledge of the world, on which he prided himself, went for nothing in the estimation of his female relatives. They thought Desirée, at sixteen, more than a match for him, as they would have thought

any other girl in the same circumstances. People say women have no *esprit du corps*, but they certainly have the most perfect contempt for any man's powers of resistance before the imagined wiles and fascinations of "a designing girl." These ladies almost gave Oswald over, as he stood, graceful and self-satisfied, in the midst of them—a monarch of all he surveyed—extending his lordly courtesies to the poor little governess. Had he but known! but he did not know anything about it, and said to himself compassionately, "Poor little thing—how pretty she is!—what could bring her here?" as he threw himself back upon the pillow in that room of which Antonio had regulated the temperature, and thought no more about Desirée; whereas poor little Desirée, charmed with the new voice, and the new grace, and the unusual kindness, dreamed of him all night.

## CHAPTER XX.

“AM I to understand that our title is somehow endangered? I do not quite comprehend your last letter,” said Oswald, addressing his father somewhat haughtily. They were in Melmar’s study, where everybody went to discuss this business, and where the son sat daintily upon a chair which he had selected from the others for his own use, leaning the points of his elbows upon the table, and looking elaborately uncomfortable. So much so, that some faint idea that this study, after all, could not be a very pleasant apartment, entered, for the first time, the mind of Melmar.

"Come nearer to the fire, Oswald," said Mr. Huntley, suddenly. He was really solicitous about the health and comfort of his son.

"Thank you ; I can scarcely breathe *here*," said the young man, ungratefully. "Was I right, sir, in supposing *that* to be your reason for writing me such a letter as your last?"

"You were right in supposing that I wanted to see you," said the father, with some natural displeasure. "You live a fine life in foreign parts, my lad ; you've little to put you about ; but what could you do for yourself, if the funds at Melmar were to fail?"

"Really the idea is disagreeable," said Oswald, laughing. "I had rather not take it into consideration, unless it is absolutely necessary."

"If it were so," said Melmar, with a little bitterness, "which of you could I depend

upon—which of you would stretch out a hand to help me?”

“To help *you*? upon my word, sir, I begin to think you must be in earnest,” said his son. “What does this mean? Is there really any other claimant for the estate? Have we any real grounds for fear? Were not you the heir-at-law?”

“I was the heir-at-law; and there is no other claimant,” said Melmar, dryly; “but there is a certain person in existence, Oswald Huntley, who, if she but turns up soon enough—and there’s two or three years yet to come and go upon—can turn both you and me to the door, and ruin us with arrears of income to the boot.”

Oswald grew rather pale. “Is this a new discovery?” he said; “or why did I, who am, next to yourself, the person most concerned, never hear of it before?”

“You were a boy in the first place; in the second place, a headstrong, self-willed lad;

nextly, delicate," said Melmar, still with a little sarcasm; "and it remains to be seen yet whether you're a reasonable man."

"Oh, hang reason!" cried the young man, with excitement. "I understand all that; what's to be done? That seems the main thing. Who is this certain person that has a better right to Melmar than we?"

"Tell me first what you would do if you knew," said Mr. Huntley, bending his red grey eyes intently upon his son. Melmar knew that there were generous young fools in the world, who would not hesitate to throw fortune and living to the winds for the sake of something called honour and justice. He had but little acquaintance with his son; he did not know what stuff Oswald was made of; he thought it just possible that the spirit of such Quixotes might animate this elegant mask of good breeding and dilettantism. For which reason he sat watching under his



grizzled bushy eyebrows, with the intentest look of those fiery eyes.

“Pshaw! do? You don’t suppose *I* would be likely to yield to any one without a struggle. Who is it?” said Oswald; “let me know plainly what you mean.”

“It is the late Me’mar’s daughter and only child—a woman with children—a woman in poor circumstances,” replied Mr. Huntley, still with a certain dry sarcasm in his voice.

“But she was disinherited?” said Oswald, eagerly.

“Her father left a will in her favour,” said Melmar, “reinstating her fully in her natural rights; that will is in the hands of our enemies, whom the old fool left his heirs, failing his daughter; she and her children, and these young men, are ready to pounce upon the estate.”

“But she was lost—did I not hear so?” cried Oswald, rising from his chair in overpowering excitement.

“Ay!” said his father, “but I know where she is.”

“In Heaven’s name, what do you mean?” cried the unfortunate young man; “is it to bewilder and overwhelm me that you tell me all this? Have we no chance? are we mere impostors? is all this certain and beyond dispute? what do you mean?”

“It is all certain,” said Melmar, steadily; “her right is unquestionable; she has heirs of her own blood, and I know where she is—she can turn us out of house and home to-morrow—she can make me a poor writer, ruined past redemption, and you a useless fine gentleman, fit for nothing in this world that I know of, and your sisters servant-maids, for I don’t know what else they’re good for. All this she can do, Oswald Huntley, and more than this, the moment she makes her appearance—but she’s as ignorant as you were half an hour ago. *I* know—but *she* does not know.”

What will Oswald do?—he is pacing up and

down the little study, no longer elegant, and calm, and self-possessed—the faint colour on his cheeks grows crimson—the veins swell upon his forehead—a profuse cold moisture comes upon his face. Pacing about the narrow space of the study, thrusting the line of chairs out of his way, clenching his delicate hand involuntarily in the tumult of his thoughts, there could not have been a greater contrast than between Oswald at his entrance, and Oswald now. His father sat and watched him under his bushy eyebrows—watched him with a steady, fixed, fascinating gaze, which the young man's firmness was not able to withstand. He burst out into uneasy, troubled exclamations.

“What are we to do, then?—must we go and seek her out, and humble ourselves before her?—must we bring her back in triumph to her inheritance? It is the only thing we can do with honour. What *are* we to do?”

“Remember, Oswald,” said Melmar, significantly, “*she* does not know.”

The young man threw himself into a chair, hid his face in his hands, and broke into low, muttered groans of vexation and despair, which sounded like curses, and perhaps were so. Then he turned towards his father violently and suddenly, with again that angry question, “What are we to do?”

He was not without honour, he was not without conscience; if he had there could have been little occasion for that burning colour, or for the cold beads of moisture on his forehead. The sudden and startling intelligence had bewildered him for a moment—then he had undergone a fierce but brief struggle—and then Oswald Huntley sank into his chair, and into the hands of his father, with that melancholy confession of his weakness—a question when the matter was unquestionable, —“what are we to do?”

“Nothing,” said Melmar, grimly, regarding

his son with a triumph which, perhaps, after all, had a little contempt in it ; this, then, was all the advantage which his refinement and fine-gentlemanliness gave him—a moment's miserable, weakly hesitation, nothing more nor better. The father, with his coarse methods of thought and unscrupulous motives, would not have hesitated—yet not a whit stronger, as it appeared, was the honour or courage of the son.

“Nothing!” said Melmar, “simply to keep quiet, and be prepared against emergencies, and if possible to stave off every proceeding for a few years more. They have a clever lad of a lawyer in their interests, which is against us, but you may trust me to keep him back if it is possible ; a few years and we are safe—I ask nothing but time.”

“And nothing from me?” said Oswald, rising with a sullen shame upon his face, which his father did not quite comprehend. The young man felt that he had no longer

any standing ground of superiority; he was humiliated, abased, cast down. Such advantage as there was in moral obtuseness and strength of purpose lay altogether with Melmar. His son only knew better, without any will to do better. He was degraded in his own eyes, and angrily conscious of it, and a sullen resentment rose within him. If he could do nothing, why tell him of this to give him a guilty consciousness of the false position which he had not courage enough to abandon? Why drag him down from his airy height of mannerly and educated elevation to prove him clay as mean as the parent whom he despised? It gave an additional pang to the overthrow. There was nothing to be done—the misery was inflicted for nothing—only as a warning to guard against an emergency which perhaps, had it come unguarded, might not have stripped Oswald so bare of self-esteem as this.

“We’ll see that,” said Melmar, slowly;

then he rose and went to the door and investigated the passages. No one was there. When he returned, he said something in his son's ears, which once more brought a flush of uneasy shame to his cheek. The father made his suggestion lightly, with a chuckle. The young man heard it in silence, with an indescribable look of self-humiliation. Then they separated—Oswald to hurry out, with his cloak round him, to the grounds where he could be alone—Melmar to bite his pen in the study, and muse over his victory. - What would come of it?—his own ingenuity and that last suggestion which he had breathed in Oswald's ear. Surely these were more than enough to baffle the foolish young Livingstones of Norlaw, and even their youthful agent? He thought so. The old Aberdonian felt secure in his own skill and cunning—he had no longer the opposition of his son to dread. What should he fear?

In the meantime, Patricia, who had seen

her brother leave the house in great haste, like a man too late for an appointment, and who had spied a light little figure crossing the bridge over Tyne before, wrapped herself up, though it was a very cold day, and set out also to see what she could discover. Malice and curiosity together did more to keep her warm than the cloak and fur tippet, yet she almost repented when she found herself among the frozen, snow-sprinkled trees, with the faint tinkle of the Kelpie striking sharp, yet drowsy, like a little stream of metal through the frost-bound stillness, and no one visible on the path, where now and then her foot slid upon a treacherous bit of ice, inlaid in the hard brown soil. Could they have left the grounds of Melmar? Where could they have gone? If they had not met, one of them must certainly have appeared by this time; and Patricia still pushed on, though her cheeks were blue and her fingers red with cold, and though the intensity of the chill made her



faint, and pierced to her poor little heart. At last she was rewarded by hearing voices before her. Yes, there they were. Desirée standing in the path, looking up at the trunk of a tree, from which Oswald was stripping a bit of velvet moss, with bells of a little white fungus, delicate and pure as flowers, growing upon it. As Patricia came up, her brother presented the prize to the little Frenchwoman, almost with the air of a lover. The breast of his poor little sister swelled with bitterness, dislike, and malicious triumph. She had found them out.

“Oswald! I thought you were quite afraid of taking cold,” cried Patricia—“dear me, who could have supposed that you would have been in the woods on such a day! I am sure Mademoiselle ought to be very proud—you would not have come for any one else in the house.”

“I am extremely indebted to you, Patricia, for letting Mademoiselle know so much,” said Oswald. “One does not like to proclaim

one's own merits. Was it on Mademoiselle's account that you, too, undertook the walk, poor child? Come, I will help you home."

"Oh, I'm sure she does not want *me!*" exclaimed Patricia, ready to cry in the height of her triumph. "Papa and you are much more in her way than I am—as long as she can make you gentlemen do what she pleases, she does not care anything about your sisters. Oh; I know all about it!—I know papa is infatuated about her, and so are you, and she is a designing little creature, and does not care a bit for Joanna. You may say what you please, but I know I am right, and I will not stand it longer—I shall go this very moment and tell mamma!"

"Mademoiselle Huntley shall not have that trouble," cried Desirée, who had been standing by utterly amazed for the first few moments, with cheeks alternately burning red and snow pale. "*I shall tell Mrs. Huntley; it concerns me most of anyone. Mademoiselle may*

be unkind if she pleases—I am used to that—but no one shall dare,” cried the little heroine, stamping her little foot, and clapping her hands in sudden passion, “to say insulting words to me! I thank you, Monsieur Oswald—but it is for me, it is not for you—let me pass—I shall tell Mrs. Huntley this moment, and I shall go!”

“Patricia is a little fool, Mademoiselle,” said Oswald, vainly endeavouring to divert the seriousness of the incident. “Nay—come, we shall all go together—but every person of sense in the house will be deeply grieved if you take this absurdity to heart. Forget it, she shall beg your pardon. Patricia!” exclaimed the young man, in a deep undertone of passion, “you ridiculous little idiot! do you know what you have done?”

“Oh, I know! I’ve told the truth—I am too clear-sighted!” sobbed Patricia, “*I* cannot help seeing that both papa and you are crazy about the governess—it will break poor mamma’s heart!”

Though Desirée was much wounded, ashamed, and angry, furious rather, to tell the truth, she could not resist the ludicrous whimper of this mock sorrow. She laughed scornfully.

“I shall go by myself, please,” she said, springing through a byway, where Oswald was not agile enough or sufficiently acquainted with to follow. “I shall tell Mrs. Huntley, instantly, and she will not break her heart—but no one in the world shall dare to speak thus again to me.”

So Desirée disappeared like a bird among the close network of frozen branches, and Patricia and her brother, admirable good friends, as one might suppose, together pursued their way home.

## CHAPTER XXI.

A SERIES of violent scenes in Melmar made a fitting climax to this little episode in the wood. Desirée demanded an interview with Mrs. Huntley, and obtained it in that lady's chamber, which interview was not over when Patricia appeared, and shortly after Melmar himself, and Oswald, who sent both the governess and her enemy away, and had a private conference with the unfortunate invalid, who was not unwilling to take up her daughter's suspicions, and condemn the little Frenchwoman as a designing girl, with schemes against the peace of the heir of Melmar.

Somehow or other, the father and son together managed to still these suspicions, or to give them another direction; for, on the conclusion of this conference, Desirée was sent for again to Mrs. Huntley's room; the little governess in the meanwhile had been busy in her own, putting her little possessions together with angry and mortified haste, her heart swelling high with a tumult of wounded pride and indignant feeling. Desirée obeyed with great stateliness. She found the mother of the house lying back upon her pillow, with a flush upon her pink cheeks, and angry tears gleaming in her weak blue eyes. Mrs. Huntley tried to be dignified, too, and to tell Desirée that she was perfectly satisfied, and there was not the slightest imputation upon her, the governess; but finding this not answer at all, and that the governess still stood in offended state, like a little queen before her, Mrs. Huntley took to her natural weapons—broke down, cried, and bemoaned

herself over the trouble she had with her family, and the vexation which Patricia gave her. "And now, when I had just hoped to see Joanna improving, then comes this disturbance in the house, and my poor nerves are shattered to pieces, and my head like to burst, and you are going away!" sobbed Mrs. Huntley. Desirée was moved to compassion; she went up to the invalid, and arranged her cushions for her, and trusted all this annoyance would not make her ill. Mrs. Huntley seized the opportunity; she went on bewailing herself, which was a natural and congenial amusement, and she made Desirée various half-sincere compliments, with a skill which no one could have suspected her of possessing. The conclusion was, that the little Frenchwoman yielded, and gave up her determination to leave Melmar; instead of that, she came and sat by Mrs. Huntley all day, reading to her, while Patricia was shut out; and a storm raged below over that exasperated and unhappy

little girl. The next day there was calm weather. Patricia was confined to her room with a headache. Joanna was energetically affectionate to her governess, and Mrs. Huntley came down-stairs on purpose to make Desirée feel comfortable. Poor little Desirée, who was so young, and in reality so simple-hearted, forgot all her resentment. Her heart was touched by the kindness which they all seemed so anxious to show her—impulses of affectionate response rose within herself—she read to Mrs. Huntley, she put her netting in order for her, she arranged her footstool as the invalid declared no one had ever been able to do it before ; and Desirée blushed and went shyly away to her embroidery, when Oswald came to sit by his mother's little table. Oswald was very animated, and anxious to please everybody ; he found a new story which nobody had seen, and read it aloud to them while the ladies worked. The day was quite an Elysian day after the troubles of the



previous one; and Desirée, with a little tumult in her heart, found herself more warmly established in Melmar that evening than she had ever been hitherto; she did not quite comprehend it, to tell the truth. All this generous desire to make her comfortable, though the girl accepted it without question as real, and never suspected deceit in it, was, notwithstanding, alien to the character of the household, and puzzled her unconsciously. But Desirée did not inquire with herself what was the cause of it. If some fairy voice whispered a reason in her ear, she blushed and tried to forget it again. No, his father and mother were proud of Oswald; they were ambitious for him; they would think such a fancy the height of folly, could it even be possible that he entertained it. No, no, no! it could not be that.

Yet, next day, when Joanna and Desirée went out to walk, Oswald encountered them before they had gone far, and seemed greatly

pleased to constitute himself the escort of his sister and her governess. If he talked to Joanna sometimes, it was to Desirée that his looks, his cares, his undertones of half confidential conversation were addressed. He persuaded them out of "the grounds" to the sunny country road leading to Kirkbride, where the sun shone warmer; but where all the country might have seen him stooping to the low stature of his sister's governess. Desirée was only sixteen; she was not wise and fortified against the blandishments of man;—she yielded with a natural pleasure to the natural pride and shy delight of her position. She had never seen any one so agreeable; she had never received before that unspoken but intoxicating homage of the young man to the young woman, which puts an end to all secondary differences and degrees. She went forward with a natural expansion at her heart—a natural brightening in her eyes—a natural radiance of young life and beauty in her face.

She could not help it. It was the first tender touch of a new sunshine upon her heart.

A woman stood by herself upon the road before them, looking out, as it seemed, for the entrance of a little by-way, which ran through the Melmar woods, and near the house, an immemorial road which no proprietor could shut up. Desirée observed Joanna run up to this bystander; observed the quick, lively, middle-aged features, the pleasant complexion and bright eyes, which turned for a moment to observe the party; yet would have passed on without further notice but for hearing the name of Cosmo.—Cosmo! could this be his mother? Desirée had her own reasons for desiring to see the Mistress; she went forward with her lively French self-possession to ask if it was Mrs. Livingstone, and if she might thank her for her son's kindness in Edinburgh. The Mistress looked at her keenly, and she looked at the Mistress; both the glances were significant, and meant more than

a common meeting ; half-a-dozen words, graceful and proper on Desirée's part, and rather abrupt and embarrassed on that of the Mistress, passed between them, and then they went upon their several ways. The result of the interview, for the little Frenchwoman, was a bright and vivid little mental photograph of the Mistress, very clear in external features, and as entirely wrong in its guess at character as was to be expected from the long and far difference between the little portrait-painter and her subject. Desirée broke through her own pleasant maze of fancy for the moment to make her rapid notes upon the Mistress. She was more interested in her than there seemed any reason for ; certainly much more than simply as the mother of Cosmo, whom she had seen but twice in her life, and was by no means concerned about.

"Who is that?" asked Oswald, when the Mistress had passed.

"It is Mrs. Livingstone, of Norlaw," said .

Joanna, "Cosmo's mother; Desirée knows; but I wonder if she was going up to Melmar? I think I'll run and ask her. I don't know why she should go to Melmar, for I am sure she ought to hate papa."

"That will do; I am not particularly curious—you need not trouble yourself to ask on my account," said Oswald, putting out his hand to stop Joanna, "and, pray, how does Mademoiselle Desirée know? I should not suppose that ruddy countrywoman was much like a friend of *yours*."

"I have never seen her before," said Desirée.

"Ah, I might have trusted that to your own good taste," said Oswald, with a bow and a smile; "but you must pardon me for feeling that such a person was not an acquaintance meet for you."

Desirée made no answer. The look and the smile made her poor little heart beat—she did not ask herself why he was so interested in her friendships and acquaintances. She

accepted it with downcast eyes and a sweet, rising colour; he *did* concern himself about all these matters belonging to her—that was enough.

“Mrs. Livingstone of Norlaw is not a common person—she is as good as we are, if she is not as rich,” cried Joanna. “*I* like her! I would rather see her than a dozen fine ladies, and, Desirée, you ought to stand up for her, too. If you think Norlaw is no’ as good as Melmar, it’s because you’re not of this country and don’t know—that is all.”

Desirée, looking up, saw to her surprise an angry and menacing look upon the face, which a minute ago had been bent with such gallant courtesy towards her own, and which was now directed to Joanna.

“Norlaw may be as good as Melmar,” said the gentle Oswald, with an emphasis which for the moment made him like Patricia; “but that is no reason why one of that family should be a worthy acquaintance for Made-

moiselle Desirée, who is not much like you, Joanna, nor your friends."

Joanna loved Desirée with all her heart—but this was going too far even for her patience; she ended the conversation abruptly by a bewildered stare in her brother's face, and a burst of tears.

"Desirée used to be fond of me, till you came—*she* was my only friend!" cried poor Joanna, whom Desirée's kiss scarcely succeeded in comforting. She did not know what to do, this poor little governess—it seemed fated that Oswald's attentions were to embroil her with all his family—yet somehow one cannot resent with very stern virtue the injustice which shows particular favour to one's self. Desirée still thought it was very kind of Oswald Huntley, to concern himself that she should have proper friends.

## CHAPTER XXII.

KATIE LOGAN was by herself in the manse parlour. Though the room was as bright as ever, the little housekeeper did not look so bright. She was darning the little stockings which filled the basket, but she was not singing her quiet song, nor thinking pleasant thoughts. Katie's eyes were red, and her cheeks pale. She was beginning to go, dark and blindfold, into a future which it broke her heart to think of. Those children of the manse, what would become of them when they had neither guide nor guardian but Katie? This was question enough to oppress the elder



sister, if everything else had not been swallowed in the thought of her father's growing weakness, of the pallor and the trembling which everyone observed, and of the exhaustion of old age into which the active minister visibly began to fall. Katie was full of these thoughts when she heard some one come to the door; she went immediately to look at herself in the mirror over the mantel-piece, and to do her best to look like her wont; but it was alike a wonder and a relief to Katie, looking round, to find the Mistress, a most unusual visitor, entering the room.

The Mistress was not much in the custom of paying visits—it embarrassed her a little when she did so, unless she had some distinct errand. She dropped into a chair near the door, and put back her veil upon her bonnet, and looked at Katie with a little air of fatigue and past excitement.

“No, no, thankye,” said the Mistress,  
“I’ve been walking, I’ll no’ come to the fire;

it's cold, but it's a fine day outbye—I just thought I would take a walk up by Whittock's Gate."

"Were you at Mrs. Blackadder's?" asked Katie.

"No," said the Mistress, with a slightly confused expression. "I was no place, but just taking a walk. What for should I no' walk for pleasure as well as my neighbours? but indeed, to tell the truth, I had a very foolish reason, Katie," she added, after a little interval. "I've never had rest in my mind after what you said of the French lassie at Melmar. I did ken of a person that was lost and married long ago, and might just as well be in France as in ony other place. She was no friend of mine, but I kent of her, and I've seen her picture and heard what like she was, so, as I could not help but turn it over in my mind, I just took the gate up there, a wise errand, to see if I could get a look of this bairn. I meant to go through the Melmar

footpath, though that house and them that belong to it are little pleasure to me ; but as guid fortune was, I met them in the road."

"Joanna and the governess?" said Katie.

"And mair than them," answered the Mistress. "A lad that I would take to be the son that's been so long away. An antic with a muckle cloak, and a black beard, and a' the looks of a French fiddler ; but Joanna called him by his name, so he bid to be her brother ; and either he's deluding the other bit lassie, or she's ensnaring him."

Katie smiled, so faintly and unlike herself, that it was not difficult to perceive how little her heart was open to amusement. The Mistress, however, who apprehended everything after her own fashion, took even this faint expression of mirth a little amiss.

"You needna laugh—there's little laughing matter in it," said the Mistress. "If a bairn of mine were to be led away after ony such fashion, do ye think *I* could find in my heart

to smile? Na, they're nae friends of mine, the present family of Melmar; but I canna see a son of a decent house, maybe beguiled by an artfu' foreign woman, however great an antic he may be himself, and take ony pleasure in it. It's aye sure to be a grief to them he belongs to, and may be destruction to the lad a' his life."

"But Desirée is only sixteen, and Oswald Huntley—if it was Oswald—is a very great deal older—he should be able to take care of himself," said Katie, repeating the offence. "You saw her, then? Do you think she was like the lady you knew?"

"I never said I knew any lady," said the Mistress, testily. "I kent of one that was lost mony a year ago. Na, na, this is naebody belonging to *her*. She was a fair, soft woman that, with blue e'en, and taller than me; but this is a bit elf of a thing, dark and little. I canna tell what put it into my head for a moment, for Melmar was

the last house in the world to look for a bairn's of *her's* in; but folk canna help nonsense thoughts. Cosmo, you see, he's a very fanciful laddie, as indeed is no' to be wondered at, and he wrote me hame word about somebody he had seen—and then hearing of this bairn asking questions about me; but it was just havers, as I kent from the first—she is no more like her than she's like you or me. But I'm sorry about the lad. Naething but ill and mischief can come of the like, so far as I've seen. If he's deluding the bairn, he's a villain, Katie, and if she's leading him on—and ane can never tell what snares are in these Frenchwomen from their very cradle—I'm sorry for Melmar and his wife, though they're no friends to me."

"I think Oswald Huntley ought to be very well able to take care of himself," repeated Katie—"and to know French ways, too. I like Desirée, and I don't like him. I hope she

will not have anything to say to him. When is Cosmo coming home?"

The Mistress, however, looked a little troubled about Cosmo. She did not answer readily.

"He's a fanciful bairn," she said, half fondly, half angrily—"as indeed what else can you expect. He's ane of the real auld Livingstones of Norlaw—aye some grand wild plan in his head for other folk, and no' that care for himself that might be meet. He would have been a knight like what used to be in the ballads in my young days, if he hadna lived ower late for that."

Pausing here, the Mistress closed her lips with a certain emphatic movement, as though she had nothing more to say upon this subject, and was about proceeding to some other, when they were both startled by the noisy opening of a door, which Katie knew to be the study. The sound was that of some feeble hand, vainly attempting to turn the handle,

and shaking the whole door with the effort which was at last successful ; then came a strange, incoherent, half-pronounced “Katie !” Katie flew to the door, with a face like death itself. The Mistress rose and waited, breathless, yet too conscious of her own impatience of intrusion to follow. Then a heavy, slow fall, as of some one whose limbs failed under him, a cry from Katie, and the sudden terrified scream of one of the maids from the kitchen moved the Mistress beyond all thoughts but those of help. She ran into the little hall of the manse, throwing her cloak off her shoulders with an involuntary promise that she could not leave this house to-day. There she saw, a melancholy sight, the minister with a grey ashen paleness upon his face, lying on the threshold of his study, not insensible, but powerless, moving with a dreadful impotence those poor, pale, trembling lips, from which no sound would come. Katie knelt beside him, supporting his head, almost

as pallid as he, aggravating, unawares, the conscious agony of his helplessness by anxious, tender questions, imploring him to speak to her—while the maid stood behind, wringing her hands, crying, and asking whether she should bring water? whether she should get some wine? what she should do?

“Flee this moment,” cried the Mistress, pushing this latter to the door, “and bring in the first man you can meet to carry him to his bed—that’s what *you’re* to do—and, Katie, Katie, whisht, dinna vex him—he canna speak to you. Keep up your heart—we’ll get him to his bed, and we’ll get the doctor, and he’ll come round.”

Katie lifted up her woeful white face to the Mistress—the poor girl did not say a word—did not even utter a sob or shed a tear. Her eyes said only, “it has come! it has come!” The blow which she had been trembling for had fallen at last. And the Mistress, who was not given to tokens of affection, stooped



down in the deep pity of her heart and kissed Katie's forehead. There was nothing to be said. This sudden calamity was beyond the reach of speech.

They got the sufferer conveyed to his room and laid on his bed a few minutes after, and within a very short time the only medical aid which the neighbourhood afforded was by the bed-side. But medical aid could do little for the minister—he was old, and had long been growing feeble, and nobody wondered to hear that he had suffered “a stroke,” and that there was very, very little hope of his recovery. The old people in Kirkbride clustered together, speaking of it with that strange, calm curiosity of age, which always seems rather to congratulate itself that some one else is the present sufferer, yet is never without the consciousness that itself may be the next. A profound sympathy, reverence, and compassion was among all the villagers—passive towards Dr. Logan,

active to Katie, the guardian and mother of the little household of orphans who soon were to have no other guardian. They said to each other, "God help her!" in her youth and loneliness—what was she to do?

As for the Mistress, she was not one of those benevolent neighbours who share in the vigils of every sick room, and have a natural faculty for nursing. To her own concentrated individual temper, the presence of strangers in any household calamity was so distasteful, that she could scarcely imagine it acceptable to others; and she never offered services which she would not have accepted. But there was neither offer nor acceptance now. The Mistress sent word at once to Marget, took off her bonnet, and without a word to anyone, took her place in the afflicted house. Even now she was but little in the sick chamber.

"If he kens her, he'll like best to see Katie—and if he doesna ken her, it'll aye be a com-

fort to herself," said the Mistress. "I'll take the charge of everything else—but his ain bairn's place is there."

"I only fear," said the doctor, "that the poor thing will wear herself out."

"She's young, and she's a good bairn," said the Mistress, "and she'll have but one father, if she lives ever so long a life. I'm no feared. No, doctor, dinna hinder Katie; if she wears herself out, poor bairn, she'll have plenty of sad time to rest in. Na, I dinna grudge her watching; she doesna feel it now, and it'll be a comfort to her a' her life."

It was, perhaps, a new doctrine to the country doctor; but he acknowledged the truth of it, and the Mistress, wise in this, left Katie to that mournful, silent, sick room, where the patient lay motionless and passive in the torpor of paralysis, perhaps conscious, it was hard to know—but unable to communicate a word of all that might be in his heart.

The children below, hushed and terror-stricken, had never been under such strict rule, yet never had known so many indulgences all their lives before ; and the Mistress took *her* night's rest upon the sofa, wrapped in a shawl and morning gown, ready to start in an instant, should she be called ; but she did not disturb the vigil of the daughter by her father's bedside.

And Katie, absorbed by her own sorrows, hardly noticed—hardly knew—this characteristic delicacy. She sat watching him with an observation so intent, that she almost fancied she could see his breath, watching the dull, grey eyes, half closed and lustreless, to note if, perhaps, a wandering light of expression might kindle in them ; watching the nerveless, impotent hands, if, perhaps, motion might be restored to them ; watching the lips, lest they should move, and she might lose the chance of guessing at some word. There was something terrible, fascinating, unearthly in

the task ; he was there upon the bed, and yet he was not there, confined in a dismal speechless prison, to which perhaps—they could not tell—their own words and movements might penetrate, but out of which nothing could come. His daughter sat beside him, looking forward with awe into the blank solemnity of the future. No mother, no father ; only the little dependent children, who had but herself to look to. She went over and over again the very same ground. Orphans, and desolate ; her thoughts stopped there, and went no further. She could not help contemplating the terrible necessity before her ; but she could not make plans while her father lay there, speechless yet breathing, in her sight.

She was sitting thus, the fourth day after his seizure, gazing at him ; the room was very still—the blinds were down—a little fire burned cheerfully in the grate—her eyes were fixed upon his eyes, watching them, and as she watched it seemed to Katie that her

father's look turned towards a narrow, ruddy, golden arrow of sunshine, which streamed in at the side of the window. She rose hastily and went up to the bed. Then his lips began to move—she bent down breathlessly; God help her!—he spoke, and she was close to his faltering lips; but all Katie's strained and agonizing senses could not tell a word of what he meant to say. What matter? his eyes were not on her, but on the sunshine—the gleam of God's boundless light coming in to the chamber of mortality—his thoughts were not with her in her sore youthful trouble. He was as calm as an angel, lying there in the death of his old age and the chill of his faculties. But she—she was young, she was desolate, she was his child—her heart cried out in intolerable anguish, and would not be satisfied. Could it be possible? Would he pass away with those moving lips, with that faint movement of a smile, and she never know what he meant to say?

With the restlessness of extreme and almost unbearable suffering, Katie rang her bell—the doctor had desired to know whenever his patient showed any signs of returning consciousness. Perhaps the sound came to the ear of the dying man, perhaps only his thoughts changed. But when she turned again, Katie found the reverent infantine calm gone from his face, and his eyes bent upon her with a terrible struggle after speech, which wrung her very heart. She cried aloud involuntarily with an echo of the agony upon that ashen face. The sound of her voice, of her hasty step and of the bell, brought the Mistress to the room, and the terrified servants to the door. Katie did not see the Mistress; she saw nothing in the world but the pitiful struggle of those palsied lips to speak to her, the anguish of uncommunicable love in those opened eyes. She bent over him, putting her very ear to his mouth; when that failed, she tried, Heaven help her, to look as if she had

heard him, to comfort his heart in his dying. The old man's eyes opened wider, dilating with the last effort—at last came a burst of incoherent sound—he had spoken—what was it? The Mistress turned her head away and bowed down upon her knees at the door, with an involuntary awe and pity, too deep for any expression, but Katie cried, “Yes, father, yes, I hear you!” with a cry that might have rent the skies. If she did, Heaven knows; she thought so—and so did he; the effort relaxed—the eyes closed—and word of human language the good minister uttered never more.

It was all over. Four little orphans sat below crying under their breath, unaware of what was their calamity—and Katie Logan above, at nineteen, desolate and unsupported, and with more cares than a mother, stood alone upon the threshold of the world.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

WHILE the peaceful Manse of Kirkbride was turned into a house of mourning, a strange little drama was being played at Melmar. The household there seemed gradually clustering, a strange chorus of observation round Oswald and Desirée, the two principal figures in the scene. Melmar himself watched the little Frenchwoman with catlike stealthiness, concentrating his regard upon her. Aunt Jean sat in her chair apart, troubled and unenlightened, perpetually calling Desirée to her, and inventing excuses to draw her out of the presence and society of Oswald. Patricia, when

she was present in the family circle, directed a spiteful watch upon the two, with the vigilance of an ill-fairy; while even Joanna, a little shocked and startled by the diversion of Desirée's regard from herself, a result which she had not quite looked for, behaved very much like a jealous lover to the poor little governess, tormenting her by alternate sulks and violent outbursts of fondness. Oswald himself, though he was always at her side, though he gave her a quite undue share of his time and attention, and made quite fantastical exhibitions of devotion, was a lover, if lover he was, ill at ease, capricious, and overstrained. He knew her pretty, he felt that she was full of mind, and spirit, and intelligence—but still she was a little girl to Oswald Huntley, who was not old enough to find in her fresh youth the charm which has subdued so many a man of the world—nor young enough to meet her on equal ground. Why he sought her at all, unless he had really “fallen in love” with

her, it seemed very hard to find out. Aunt Jean, looking on with her sharp black eyes, could only shake her head in silent wonder, and doubt, and discomfort. He could have “nae motive”—but Aunt Jean thought that lovers looked differently in her days, and a vague suspicion disturbed the mind of the old woman. She used to call Desirée to her own side, to keep her there talking of her embroidery, or telling her old stories of which the girl began to tire, being occupied by other thoughts. The hero himself was unaware of, and totally indifferent to, Aunt Jean’s scrutiny, but Melmar himself sometimes turned his fiery eyes to her corner, with a glance of doubt and apprehension. She was the only spectator in the house, of whose inspection Mr. Huntley was at all afraid.

Meanwhile Desirée herself lived in a dream—the first dream of extreme youth, of a tender heart and gentle imagination, brought for the first time into personal contact with

the grand enchantress and Armida of life. Desirée was not learned in the looks of lover's eyes—she had no “experience,” poor child! to guide her in this early experiment and trembling delight of unfamiliar emotion. She knew she was poor, young, solitary, Joanna's little French governess, yet that it was she, the little dependent, whom Joanna's graceful brother, everybody else's superior, singled out for his regard. Her humble little heart responded with all a young girl's natural flutter of pride, of gratitude, of exquisite and tremulous pleasure. There could be but one reason in the world to induce this unaccustomed homage and devotion. She could not believe that Oswald admired or found anything remarkable in herself, only—strange mystery, not to be thought of save with the blush of that profoundest humility which is born of affection!—only, by some unexplainable, unbelievable wonder, it must be love. Desirée did

not enter into any questions on the subject; she yielded to the fascination; it made her proud, it made her humble, it filled her with the tenderest gratitude, it subdued her little fiery spirit like a spell. She was very, very young, she knew nothing of life or of the world, she lived in a little world of her own, where this grand figure was the centre of everything; and it was a grand figure in the dewy, tender light of Desirée's young eyes—in the perfect globe of Desirée's maiden fancy—but it was not Oswald Huntley, deeply though the poor child believed it was.

So they all grouped around her, watching her, some of them perplexed, some of them scheming; and Oswald played his part, sometimes lothing it, but for the most part, finding it quite agreeable to his vanity, while poor little Desirée went on in her dream, thinking she had fallen upon a charmed life, seeing everything through the glamour in her own eyes, believing everything was true.

“Dr. Logan is ill,” said Melmar, on one of those fairy days, when they all met round the table at lunch; all but Mrs. Huntley, who had relapsed into her quiescent invalidism, and was made comfortable in her own room — “very ill—so ill that I may as well mind my promise to old Gordon of Ruchlaw for his minister-son.”

“Oh, papa, don’t be so hard-hearted!” cried Joanna—“he’ll maybe get better yet. He’s no’ such a very old man, and he preached last Sabbath-day. Oh, poor Katie! but he has not been a week ill yet, and he’ll get better again.”

“Who is Gordon of Ruchlaw? and who is his minister-son?” asked Oswald.

Joanna made a volunteer answer.

“A nasty, snuffy, disagreeable man!” cried Joanna, with enthusiasm. “I am sure I would never enter the church again if he was there; but it’s very cruel and hard-hearted, and just like papa, to speak of him. Dr.

Logan is only ill. I would break my heart if I thought he was going to die."

"Gordon would be a very useful man to us," said Melmar—"a great deal more so than Logan ever was. I mean to write and ask him here, now that his time's coming. Be quiet, Joan, and let's have no more nonsense. I'll tell Auntie Jean. If you play your cards well, you might have a good chance of him yourself, you monkey, and with Aunt Jean's fortune to furnish the manse, you might do worse. Ha! ha! I wonder what Patricia would say?"

"Patricia would say it was quite good enough for Joanna," said that amiable young lady. "A poor Scotch minister! I am thankful *I* never had such low tastes. Nobody would speak of such a thing to me."

"Don't quarrel about the new man till the old man is dead, at least," said Oswald, laughing. "Mademoiselle Desirée quite agrees

with me, I know. She is shocked to hear all this. Is it not so ? ”

“ I thought of his daughter,” said Desirée, who was very much shocked, and had tears in her eyes. “ She will be an orphan now.”

“ And Desirée was very fond of Katie,” said Joanna, looking half jealously, half fondly at the little governess, “ and so am I too ; and she has all the little ones to take care of. Oh, papa, I’ll never believe that Dr. Logan is going to die.”

“ Fhat is all this, Joan ? tell me,” cried Aunt Jean, who had already shown signs of curiosity and impatience. This was the signal for breaking up the party. When Joanna put her lips close to the old woman’s ear, and began to shout the required information, the others dispersed rapidly. Desirée went to her room to get her cloak and bonnet. It was her hour for walking with her pupil, and that walk was now an enchanted progress, a fairy road, leading ever further and further into her fairy



land. As for Oswald, he stood in the window, looking out and shrugging his shoulders at the cold. His blood was not warm enough to bear the chill of the northern wind ; the sight of the frost-bound paths and whitened branches made him shiver before he went out. He meant to attend the girls in their walk, in spite of his shiver ; but the frosty path by the side of Tyne was not a fairy road to him.

Joanna had left them on some erratic expedition among the trees ; they were alone together, Desirée walking by Oswald's side, very quiet and silent, with her eyes cast down, and a tremor at her heart. The poor little girl did not expect anything particular, for they were often enough together thus—still she became silent in spite of herself, as she wandered on in her dream by Oswald's side, and, in spite of herself, cast down her eyes, and felt the colour wavering on her cheek. Perhaps he saw it and was pleased—he liked such moments well enough. They had all the

amusing, tantalizing, dramatic pleasure of moments which might be turned to admirable account, but never were so,—moments full of expectation and possibility, of which nothing ever came.

At this particular moment Oswald was, as it happened, very tenderly gracious to Desirée. He was asking about her family, or rather her mother, whom, it appeared, he had heard of without hearing of any other relative, and Desirée, in answering, spoke of Marie—who was Marie? “Did I never, then, tell you of my sister?” said Desirée, with a blush and smile.

“Your sister?—I was not aware—” stammered Oswald—and he looked at her so closely and coldly, and with such a scrutinizing air of suspicion, that Desirée stared at him, in return, with amazement and half-terror.—“Perhaps Mademoiselle Desirée has brothers also,” he said, in the same tone, still looking at her keenly. What if she had brothers? Would it have been wrong?

“No,” said Desirée, quietly. The poor child was subdued by the dread of having wounded him. She thought it grieved him to have so little of her confidence; it could be nothing but that which made him look so cold and speak so harsh.

“Then Mademoiselle Marie is a little sister—a child?” said Oswald, softening slightly.

Desirée clapped her hands and laughed with sudden glee. “Oh, no, no,” she cried merrily, “she is my elder sister; she is not even Mademoiselle; she is married! Poor Marie!” added the little girl, softly. “I wish she were here.”

And for the moment Desirée did not see the look that regarded her. When she lifted her eyes again, she started and could not comprehend the change. Oswald’s lip was blue with cold, with dismay, with contempt, with a mixture of feelings which his companion had no clue to, and could not understand. “Mademoiselle has, no doubt, a number of

little nephews and nieces," he said, with a sinister curl of that blue lip over his white teeth. The look struck to Desirée's heart with a pang of amazement and terror—what did it mean?

"Oh, no, no, not any," she said, with a deep blush. She was startled and disturbed out of all her maiden fancies—was it a nervous, jealous irritation, to find that she had friends more than he knew. It was very strange—and when Joanna rejoined them shortly, Oswald made an excuse for himself, and left them. The girls followed him slowly, after a time, to the house; Desirée could scarcely answer Joanna's questions, or appear interested in her pupil's interests. What was the reason? She bewildered her poor little head asking this question; but no answer came.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

IT was a kind of twilight in Aunt Jean's room, though it was still daylight out of doors; the sun, as it drew to the west, threw a ruddy glory upon this side of the house of Melmar, and coming in at Aunt Jean's window, had thrown its full force upon the fireplace half an hour ago. It was the old lady's belief that the sun put out the fire, so she had drawn down her blind, and the warm, domestic glimmer of the firelight played upon the high bed, with those heavy, dull, moreen curtains, which defied all brightness—upon the brighter toilet-glass on the table, and upon the old lofty chest of

drawers, polished and black like ebony, which stood at the further side of the room. Aunt Jean herself sat in a high-backed arm-chair by the fire, where she loved to sit—and Desirée and Joanna, kneeling on the rug before her, were turning out the contents of a great basket, full of such scraps as Aunt Jean loved to accumulate, and girls have pleasure in turning over; there were bits of silk, bits of splendid old ribbon, long enough for “bows,” in some cases, but in some only fit for pin-cushions and needle-books of unbelievable splendour, bits of lace, bits of old-fashioned embroidery, bits of almost every costly material belonging to a lady’s wardrobe. It was a pretty scene; the basket on the rug, with its many-coloured stores, the pretty little figure of Desirée, with the firelight shining in her hair, the less graceful form of Joanna, which still was youthful, and honest, and eager, as she knelt opposite the fire, which flushed her face and reddened her hair at its will;

and calmly seated in her elbow-chair, overseeing all, Aunt Jean, with her white neckerchief pinned over her gown, and her white apron warm in the firelight, and the broad black ribbon bound round her old-fashioned cap, and the vivacious sparkle of those black eyes, which were not "hard of hearing," though their owner was. The pale daylight came in behind the old lady, faintly through the misty atmosphere and the closed blind—but the ruddier domestic light within went flickering and sparkling over the high-canopied bed, the old-fashioned furniture, and the group by the hearth. When Joanna went away, the picture was even improved perhaps, for Desirée still knelt half meditatively by the fire, turning over with one hand the things in the basket, listening to what the old lady said, and wistfully pondering upon her own thoughts.

"Some o' the things were here when I came," said Aunt Jean. "I was not so auld then as I am now—I laid them a' away,

Deseery, for fear the real daughter of the house should ever come hame ; for this present Melmar wasna heir by nature. If right had been right, there's ane before him in the succession to this house ; but, poor misguided thing, fha was gaun to seek her ? but I laid by the bits o' things ; I thought they might 'mind her some time of the days o' her youth."

" Who was she ? " said Desirée, softly ; she did not ask so as to be heard by her companion—she did not ask as if she cared for an answer—she said it quietly, in a half whisper to herself ; yet Aunt Jean heard Desirée's question with her lively eyes, which were fixed upon the girl's pretty figure, half kneeling, half reclining at her feet.

" Fha was she ? She was the daughter of this house," said Aunt Jean, " and fhats mair, the mistress of this house, Deseery, if she should ever come hame."

The little Frenchwoman looked up sharply, keenly, with an alarmed expression on her



face. She did not ask any further question, but she met Aunt Jean's black eyes with eyes still brighter in their youthful lustre, yet dimmed with an indefinable cloud of suspicion and fear.

What was in the old woman's mind it was hard to tell. Whether she had any definite ground to go upon, or merely proceeded on an impulse of the vague anxiety in her mind.

"Deed, ay," said Aunt Jean, nodding her lively little head, "I'll tell you a' her story, my dear, and you can tell me fhat you think when I'm done. She was the only bairn and heir of that silly auld man that was Laird of Melmar before this present lad, my niece's good-man—she was very bonnie, and muckle thought of, and she married and ran away, and that's all the folk ken of her, Deseery; but whisht, bairn, and I'll tell you mair."

Desirée had sunk lower on her knees, leaning back, with her head turned anxiously

towards the story-teller. She was an interested listener at least.

“It’s aye thought she was disinherited,” said Aunt Jean, “and at the first, when she ran away, maybe so she was—but nature will speak. When this silly auld man, as I’m saying, died, he left a will setting up her rights, and left it in the hand of another silly haverel of a man, that was a bit sma’ laird at Norlaw. This man was to be heir himsel’ if she never was found—but he had a sma’ spirit, Deseery, and he never could find her. She’s never been found from that day to this—but it’ll be a sore day for Melmar when she comes hame.”

“Why?” said Desirée, somewhat sharply and shrilly, with a voice which reached the old woman’s ears, distant though they were.

“Fhat for?—because they’ll have to give up all the lands, and all the siller, and all their living into her hand—that’s fhat for,” said Aunt Jean; “nae person in this countryside can tell if she’s living, or fhaur she is; she’s

been away langer than you've been in this life, Deseery ; and Melmar, the present lad—I canna blame him, he was the next of the blood after hersel', nae doubt he thought she was dead and gane, as a'boddy else did when he took possession—and his heart rose doubtless against the other person that was left heir, failing her, being neither a Huntley nor nigh in blood ; but if aught should befall to bring her hame—ay, Deseery, it would be a sore day for this family, and every person in this house."

"Why?" asked Desirée again with a tremble—this time her voice did not reach the ear of Aunt Jean, but her troubled, downcast eyes, her disturbed look, touched the old woman's heart.

"If it was a story I was telling out of a book," said the old woman, "I would say they were a' in misery at keeping her out of her rights—or that the man was a villain that held her place—but you're no' to think

that. I dinna doubt he heeds his ain business mair than he heeds her—it's but natural, fha would do otherwise? and then he takes comfort to his mind that she must be dead, or she would have turned up before now, and then he thinks upon his ain family, and considers his first duty is for them; and then—deed ay, my dear, memory fails—I wouldna say but he often forgets that there was another person in the world but himsel' that had a right—that's nature, Deseery, just nature—folk learn to think the way it's their profit to think, and believe what suits them best, and they're sincere, too, except maybe just at the first; you may not think it, being a bairn, yet it's true."

"If it were me," cried Desirée, with a vehemence which penetrated Aunt Jean's infirmity, "the money would burn me, would scorch me, till I could give it back to the true heir!"

"Ay," said Aunt Jean, shaking her head, "I wouldna say I could be easy in my mind

mysel'—but it's wonderful how weel the like of you and me, my dear, can settle ither folks' concerns. Melmar, you see, he's no' an ill man, he thinks otherwise, and I daur to say he's begun to forget a' about her, or just thinks she's dead and gane, as most folk think. I canna help aye an expectation to see her back before I die my ainsel'—but that's no' to say Me'mar has ony thought of the kind. Folk that are away for twenty years, and never seen, nor heard tell o', canna expect to be minded upon and waited upon. It's very like, upon the whole, that she *is* dead many a year syne—and fhat for should Melmar, that kens nothing about her—aye except that she could take his living away frae him—fhat for, I'm asking, should Melmar gang away upon his travels looking for her, like yon other haverel of a man?"

"What other man?" cried Desirée, eagerly.

"Oh, just Norlaw—he was aince her wooer himsel', poor haverel," said Aunt Jean; "he

gaed roaming about a' the world seeking after her, leaving his wife and his bonnie bairns at hame—but fhat good did he?—just nought ava, Deseery, except waste his ain time, and lose his siller, and gie his wife a sair heart. She's made muckle mischief in her day, this Mary of Melmar. They say she was very bonnie, though I never saw her mysel'; and fhat for, think you, should the present lad, that kens nought about her, take up his staff and gang travelling the world to seek for her? Oh, fie, nae!—he has mair duty to his ain house, and bairns, than to a strange woman that he kens not where to seek, and that would make him a beggar if he found her—I canna see she deserves ony such thing at his hand."

At first Desirée did not answer a word; her cheek was burning hot with excitement, her face shadowed with an angry cloud, her little hand clenched involuntarily, her brow knitted. She was thinking of something private to herself, which roused a passion of resentment

within the breast of the girl. At last she started up and came close to Aunt Jean.

“But if you knew that she was living—and where she was?” cried Desirée, “what would you do?”

“Me! Oh, my bairn!” cried Aunt Jean, in sudden dismay. “Me! what have I to do with their concerns!—me! it’s nane of my business. The Lord keep that and a’ evil out of a poor auld woman’s knowledge—I havena eaten his bread, I never would be beholden that far to any mortal—but I’ve sitten under his roof tree for mony a year. Me!—if I heard word of such awfu’ news I would gang furth of this door this moment, that I mightna be a traitor in the man’s very dwelling—eh, the Lord help me, the thought’s dreadful! for I behoved to let her ken!”

“And what if he knew?” asked Desirée, in a sharp whisper, gazing into Aunt Jean’s eyes with a look that pierced like an arrow.

The old woman's look fell, but it was not to escape this gaze of inquiry.

"The Lord help him!" said aunt Jean, pitifully. "I can but hope he would do right, Deseery; but human nature's frail—I canna tell."

This reply softened for the moment the vehement angry look of the little Frenchwoman. She came again to kneel before the fire, and was silent, thinking her own thoughts—then another and a new fancy seemed to rise like a mist over her face; she looked up dismayed to Aunt Jean, with an unexplained and terrified question, which the old woman could not interpret. Then she tried to command herself with an evident effort—but it was useless. She sprang up, and came close, with a shivering chill upon her, to put her lips to Aunt Jean's ear.

"Do they all know of this story?" she asked, in the low, sharp voice, strangely intense and passionate, which even deafness



itself could not refuse to hear—and Desirée fixed her gaze upon the old woman's eyes, holding her fast with an eager scrutiny, as though she trembled to be put off with anything less than the truth.

“Hout, no,” said Aunt Jean, disturbed a little, yet confident, “fha would tell the like of Patricia or Joan—fuils and bairns!—and as for the like of my niece herself, she's muckle taken up with her ain bits of troubles—she might hear of it at the time, but she would forget the day after; naebody minds but me.”

“And—Oswald?” cried Desirée, sharply, once again.

“Eh, ay—I wasna thinking upon him—he's the heir,” said Aunt Jean, turning her eyes sharp and keen upon her young questioner. “I canna tell fhat for you ask me so earnest, bairn—yon maunna think mair of Oswald Huntley than becomes baith him and you; ay, doubtless, you're right whatever learned ye—*he* kens.”

Desirée did not say another word ; but she clasped her hands tightly together, sprang out of the room with the pace of a deer, and before Aunt Jean had roused herself from her amazement, had thrown her cloak over her shoulders, and rushed out into the gathering night.

## CHAPTER XXV.

THE sunset glory of this January evening still shone over the tops of the trees upon the high bank of Tyne, leaving a red illumination among the winter clouds; but low upon the path the evening was gathering darkly and chilly, settling down upon the icecold branches which pricked the hasty passenger like thorns, in the black dryness of the frost. The Kelpie itself was scarcely recognizable in the torpid and tiny stream which trickled down its little ravine—only the sharp sound of its monotone in the tingling air made you aware of its vicinity; and frozen Tyne no longer added his

voice to make the silence musical. The silence was dry, hard, and harsh, the sounds were shrill, the air cut like a knife. No creature that could find shelter was out of doors—yet poor little Desirée, vehement, wilful, and passionate, with her cloak over her shoulders, and her pretty uncovered head, exposed to all the chill of the unkindly air, went rushing out with her light foot and little fairy figure, straight as an arrow over Tyne, and came up the frozen path—into the wood and the night.

One side of her face was still scorched and crimsoned with the fervour of Aunt Jean's fire, before which she had been bending,—the other, in comparison, was already chilled and white. She ran along up the icy, chilly road, with the night-wind cutting her delicate little ears, and her rapid footsteps sliding upon the knots of roots in the path, straight up to that height where the Kelpie trickled, and the last red cloud melted into grey behind the trees. The dubious, failing

twilight was wan among those branches where never a bird stirred. There was not a sound of life anywhere, save in the metallic tinkle of that drowsing waterfall. Desirée rushed through the silence and the darkness, and threw herself down upon the hard path, on one of the hard root knots beneath a tree. She was not sorry, in her passionate *abandon*, to feel the air prick her cheek, to see the darkness closing over her, to know that the cold pierced to the bone, and that she was almost unprotected from its rigour. All this desolation was in keeping with the tumult which moved the wilful heart of the little stranger. The prick of the wind neutralized somewhat the fiery prick in her heart.

Poor little Desirée! She had indeed enough to think of—from her morning's flush of happiness and dawning love to plunge into a cold profound of treachery, deceit, and falsehood like that which gaped at her feet, ready to swallow her up. For the moment it

was anger alone, passionate and vivid as her nature, which burned within her. She, frank, child-like, and unsuspecting, had been degraded by a pretended love, a false friendship; had been warned "for her own sake" by the treacherous host whom Desirée hated, in her passion, to say nothing of her descent, or of her mother. For her own sake! and not a syllable of acknowledgment to confess how well the wily schemer knew who that mother was. Yet, alas, if that had but been all!—if there had been nothing to do but to confound Melmar, to renounce Joanna, to shake off the dust of her indignant feet against the house where they would have kept her in bondage! If that had but been all! But Desirée clenched her little hands with a pang of angry and bitter resentment far more overpowering. To think that she should have been insulted with a false love! Bitter shame, quick passionate anger, even the impulse of revenge, came like a flood over the breast of the girl

as she sat shivering with cold and passion at the foot of that tree, with the dark winter night closing over her. She could almost fancy she saw the curl of Oswald Huntley's lip as he heard to-day, on this very spot, that she had a sister—she could almost suppose, if he stood there now, that she had both strength and will to thrust him through the rustling bushes down to the crackling, frozen Tyne, to sink like a stone beneath the ice which was less treacherous than himself. Poor little desolate, solitary stranger! She sat in the darkness and the cold, with the tears freezing in her eyes, but passion burning in her heart—she cried aloud in the silence with an irrepressible cry of fury and anguish; the voice of a young savage, the uncontrolled, unrestrained absolute violence of a child. She was half crazed with the sudden downfall, the sudden injury—she could think of nothing but the sin that had been done against her, the vengeance, sharp and sudden as

her passion, which she would inflict if she could.

But as poor little Desirée crouched beneath the tree, not even the vehemence of her resentment could preserve her from the influences of Nature. Her little feet seemed frozen to the path ; her hands were numb and powerless, and ice-cold as the frozen water beneath. The chill stole to her heart with a sickening faintness, then a gradual languor crept over her passion ; by degrees she felt nothing but the cold, the sharp rustle of the branches, the chill gloom of the night, the harsh wind that blew in at her uncovered ears. Her hair fell down on her neck, and her fingers were too powerless to put it up. She had no heart to return to the house from which she fled in so violent an excess of insulted feeling—it almost seemed that she had no place in the world to go to, poor child, but this desolate winter woodland, which in its summer beauty she had associated with her mother.



The night blinded her, and so did the growing sickness of extreme cold. Another moment, and poor little Desirée sank against the tree, passionless and fainting—the last thought in her heart a low outcry for her mother, who was hundreds of miles away and could not hear.

The cold was still growing sharper and keener as the last glimmer of daylight faded out of the skies. She might have slid down into the frozen Tyne, as she had imagined her enemy, or she might have perished in her favourite path, in the cold which was as sharp as an Arctic frost. But Providence does not desert those poor, suffering, wicked children who fly to death's door at the impulse of passion as Desirée did. A labourer, hastening home by the footpath through the Melmar woods, wandered out of his way, by chance, and stumbled over the poor little figure lying in the path. When the man had got over his first alarm, he lifted her up and

carried her like a child—she was not much more—to Melmar, where he went to the side door and brought her in among the servants to that great kitchen, which was the most cheerful apartment in the house. The maids were kindhearted, and liked the poor little governess—they chafed her hands and bathed her feet, and wrapped her in blankets, and, at last, brought Desirée to her senses. When she came alive again, the poor, naughty child looked round her bewildered, and did not know where she was—the place was strange to her—and it looked so bright and homely that Desirée's poor little heart was touched by a vague contrasting sense of misery.

“I should like to go to bed,” she said, sadly, turning her face away from the light to a kind housemaid, who stood by her and who could not tell what ailed “the French miss,” whom all the servants had thought rather too well-used of late days, and whose look of misery seemed unaccountable.

“Eh, Missie, but ye maun wait until the fire’s kindled,” said the maid.

Desirée did not want a fire—she had no desire to be comforted and warmed, and made comfortable—she would almost rather have crept out again into the cold and the night. Notwithstanding, they carried her up the stairs carefully, liking the stranger all the better for being sad and in trouble and dependent on them—and undressed her like a child, and laid her in bed in her little room, warm with firelight, and looking bright with comfort and kindness. Then the pretty housemaid, whom Patricia exercised her tempers on, brought Desirée a warm drink and exhorted her to go to sleep.

“What made ye rin out into the cauld night, Missie, without a thing on your head,” said Jenny Shaw, compassionately; “but lie still and keep yoursel’ warm—naebody kens yet but us in the kitchen, or Miss Joan would be here; but I thought you would like best

to be quiet, and it would do you mair good."

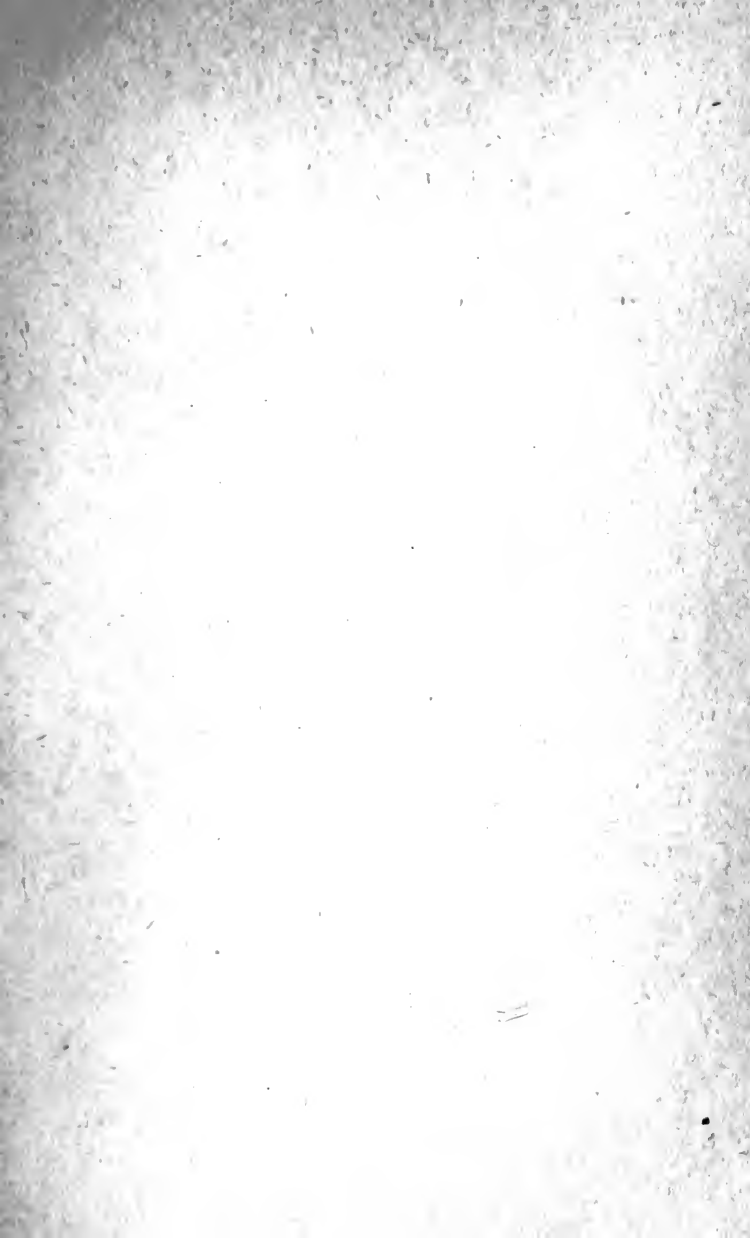
"Oh, dear Jenny, don't let anyone know—don't tell them—promise!" cried Desirée, half starting from her bed.

The maid did not know what to make of it, but she promised, to compose the poor little sufferer; and so Desirée was left by herself in the little room, with the warm firelight flickering about the walls, and her little hands and feet, which had been so cold, burning and prickling with a feverish heat, her limbs aching, her thoughts wandering, her heart lost in an ineffable, unspeakable melancholy. She could not return to her passion, to the bitter hurry and tumult of resentful fancies which had occupied her out of doors. She lay thinking, trying to think, vainly endeavouring to confine the wandering crowd of thoughts, which made her head ache, and which seemed to float over every subject under heaven. She tried to say her prayers, poor child, but lost

them in an incoherent mist of fancy. She fell asleep, and awoke in a few minutes, thinking she had slept for hours—worse than that, she fell half asleep into a painful drowse, where waking thoughts and dreams mingled with and confused each other. Years of silence and unendurable solitude seemed to pass over her before Jenny Shaw came upstairs again to ask her how she was, and the last thing clear in Desirée's remembrance was that Jenny promised once more not to tell anyone. Desirée did not know that the good-hearted Jenny half slept, half watched in her room all that night. The poor child knew nothing next day but that her limbs ached, and her head burned, and that a dull sense of pain was at her heart. She was very ill with all her exposure and suffering—she was ill for some time making a strange commotion in the house. But no one had any idea of the cause of her illness, save perhaps Aunt Jean, who did not say a word to anyone, but trotted about the sick-room, “cheering

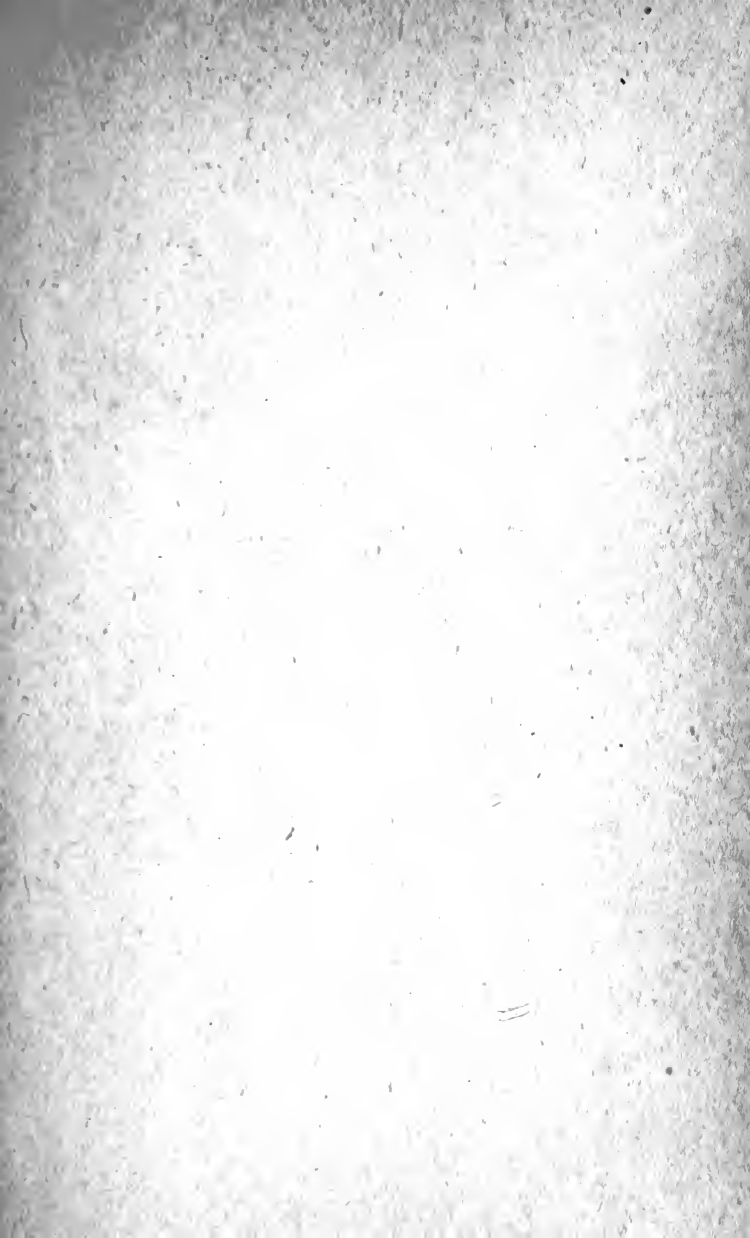
up" the little sick stranger and finding out her wants with strange skill in spite of her deafness. All the time of Desirée's illness Aunt Jean took not the slightest notice of Oswald Huntley—she was doubly deaf when he addressed her—she lost even her sharp and lively eyesight when he encountered her on the stair. Aunt Jean did not know what ailed Desirée besides the severe cold and fever which the doctor decided on, but the old woman remembered perfectly at what point of their conversation it was that the little girl rushed from her side and fled out of the house—and she guessed at many things with a keen and lively penetration which came very near the truth. And so Desirée was very ill, and got slowly well again, bringing with her out of her sickness a thing more hard to cure than fever—a sick heart.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.













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